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ABSTRACT

Papers on linguistics and language teaching in this volume are the following: "Language in Education: Hard Choices for Hong Kong" (Jo Lewkowicz); "EL2--Medium Education in a Largely Monolingual Society: The Case of Hong Kong" (Nigel Bruce); "A Programme for Semantics" (Laurence Goldstein); "Semantics and Its Critics (A Comment)" (Roy Harris); "Semantic Shamantics (A Reply)" (Laurence Goldstein); "Reading-Aloud Speed as a Factor in Oral Fluency and General Language Proficiency" (David Coniam); "Notions of 'Error' and Appropriate Corrective Treatment" (Nancy Lee); and "Errors in Focus? Native and Non-Native Perceptions of Error Salience in Hong Kong Student English--A Case Study" (Mark Newbrook). Editorial policy, a style sheet, notes on contributors, and an index to papers in volumes 1-12 are also included. (MSE)

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HONGKONG PAPERS IN LINGUISTICS & LANGUAGE TEACHING

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LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION; HARD CHOICES FOR HONG KONG

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University of Hong Kong

Part One: HKU Language Centre's Response to the Education Department's Report of the Working Group set up to review Language Improvement Measures.

1.0. Introduction

In December 1988 the Education Department established a Working Group to review existing language improvement measures. The Group was set up in consultation with the Secretary for Education and Manpower under the Chairmanship of the Deputy Director of Education. Its terms of reference as described in its report (p.1) were as follows:

*To conduct an internal review of existing English and Chinese language improvement measures in order to evaluate their effectiveness;

*To identify where further improvements are necessary or desirable;

*To propose appropriate measures for achieving such improvement, and

*To submit a report to the Director of Education on the findings of the Working Group by 31 March 1989.

As a result of its findings, the Working Group published its report in May 1989. The Education Department then invited the public to respond to this report so that it could consider the views of all interested parties before any substantial changes to the existing education system were recommended or implemented.

The following paper is the Language Centre's response to the report. It was, of course, initially written for the Education Department, but it is hoped that the two main questions we address, namely the issue of educational opportunity and the standards of educational attainment, are of more general interest not only to tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, but also to other readers.

1.1. Equality of Educational Opportunity

The changes suggested in the report are aimed at providing Secondary School pupils with *separate but equal* educational opportunities. Yet, we fear that there are a number of reasons why equality may not be achieved.

(i) *Threat of exodus from state schools:* Pupils, and more so their parents, may perceive English medium education as a better, more desirable product, and may be willing to secure this at all cost. At best this would result in a mushrooming of the private education sector, but more likely, it would put pressure on the public sector and cause a breakdown of the system.

(ii) *The charge of elitism*: While the two parallel systems proposed might be equal in their educational objectives, elitism would inevitably be intensified. The smaller number of students studying through the medium of English would most probably be seen as privileged, which would breed animosity and bring with it a number of negative social effects.

(iii) *Choice of medium: fixed menu or 'a la carte'* ?: The Education Department seems loath to conceive of a more flexible approach to an individual child's secondary curriculum. The report offers two fixed menus (Secondary 1 streaming) when the major structural changes proposed to cope with streaming would accommodate a more flexible 'a la carte' approach. Why should there be a fixed demarcation line, from the age of 11, between those who study in English and those who study through the medium of Cantonese? **Surely the amount of English children are exposed to could be increased as and when the pupils indicate their readiness, whether by aptitude or by personal or parental choice. The pooling of schools' resources by area would allow such flexibility, and there is little evidence that learning or teaching would suffer from a variably mixed 'diet' in the curriculum.**

(iv) *Career and academic prospects*: Even if pupils are given an equally good education in school, unless they have equality of opportunity on leaving, they will not perceive their education as equal. It is true that the new system proposes a bridging programme to assist those in Chinese-medium education planning to go on to tertiary education, but it appears to have neglected those wanting to join the work-force and needing English for vocational purposes. If by 1994 there are to be 15,000 first-year university places filled in what is a predominantly English-medium tertiary sector, and if the commercial sector is already organising itself to improve what it sees as unacceptable standards of English, then from what source will emerge the proficient English-users the job market in Hong Kong so badly needs ? **If both the commercial and tertiary sectors are not to see a severe drop in English standards, at least 30-40% of the pupils studying through the medium of Chinese should be encouraged to study one or possibly two subjects in English (either selected by the students out of interest or as an academic requirement). Optimal flexibility could again be achieved by schools pooling resources in order to offer children a broad range of choice as to which subjects they would like to study in English or Chinese.**

A further point of concern, and one not given prominence in the report, is *the psychological cost* of moving from Chinese-medium to English-medium education. It appears the recommendation for the switch to be between primary and secondary or between secondary and tertiary is based on the administrative ease with which the transition could be accomplished. However, it does not take into account the psychological effect this would have on the pupils, especially those in Primary 6. Already there is pressure on these pupils to do well to get to a good secondary school. The additional pressure that streaming would create could be more than many children could handle. And would the system be fair to late developers?

We would therefore recommend **delaying streaming until the pupils have got used to their new school, say till the end of Secondary 2. Having adjusted to their new environment, pupils would then be more ready to tackle the next hurdle in their educational careers, and take those tests that the present proposals suggest should be sat on entry to Secondary school. In light of our previous recommendations, even though these tests would remain important, they would no longer determine a pupil's medium of instruction throughout the rest of secondary school.**

1.2. Standards of Educational Attainment

The Education Department's recognition of the need to raise standards at the lower end of the educational spectrum is commendable and has our full support. But this raising of standards must not be brought about at the expense of sacrificing existing standards at the top end of the educational pyramid. It is important that the Education Department recognizes the interlocking nature of the individual levels of the educational system and addresses the question of standards not only within secondary schools, but at tertiary level as well. It must therefore not shy away from the questions of how to:

- **improve language teaching** in secondary schools;
- develop suitable **bridging programmes** for Chinese-stream entrants to tertiary education;
- **maintain** (or even enhance) the **standards of language** used in the tertiary sector.

(i) Improving Language Teaching in Secondary Schools

There seems little doubt that with the proposed changes the overall standards of education as well as the standard of academic usage of Cantonese and written Chinese will rise for a large majority of the school population, provided sufficient time and resources are devoted to developing Chinese language teaching materials, staff training, etc. At the same time, however, there will most probably be a fall in the standard of English; pupils' exposure to the written word in English will be substantially reduced. Therefore, if English continues to be seen as important, the role of language teaching (as opposed to teaching through the medium of English) will, as pointed out in the report, need to be reassessed. **The strengthening of language teaching will therefore be crucial to the success of the changes, but it will require substantial investment of time, resources, etc.** Already there is a shortage of English teachers in Hong Kong. Will the necessary resources be made available for language teaching in future?

(ii) Bridging Programmes

In order to maintain standards within the tertiary sector it is essential that the proposed bridging programmes provide students with the English they need for academic purposes. If they fail to do so, universities will opt for those candidates who on application have an adequate knowledge of English, thus disadvantaging those who study through the medium of Cantonese at school. The tertiary institutions perceived as less prestigious would then be left to cope with declining standards of English and in the long run might have to opt for conducting courses solely in Cantonese.

In view of the Education Department's failure to consult the tertiary institutions adequately, it is not surprising that their recommendations for bridging programmes are being greeted with scepticism. Of particular concern is the vagueness over the allocation of responsibility for running the bridging programmes as well as their length. A "catch 22" situation is conceivable whereby universities will on the one hand be reluctant to invest time and money into these courses, especially if they can recruit sufficient applicants with English who do not need such a course. Yet, on the other hand, they may not recognise any post 'A' level bridging programmes run in schools on the grounds that schools lack the necessary expertise to prepare pupils for academic study through the medium of Engiish...

The problem of allocating responsibility for the bridging programme can, therefore, only be solved through dialogue with representatives of all the institutions concened. **It is possible that**

tertiary institutions would opt to work out and conduct their own bridging programmes. But they may recommend an alternative, that of sixth-form colleges which would take on the responsibility of running the necessary language training. Whichever solution is chosen, the Education Department will have to ensure that the tertiary institutions are involved at every stage of the planning process, and that sufficient resources for the courses are made available. Underfunding of these courses would have a serious consequence for tertiary education in Hong Kong.

A further point of concern is the length of time specified in the report as necessary to bring up Chinese-stream pupils to the required standard of English. The report assumes that within one year students can master sufficient language to handle an English-medium tertiary education. It may, however, take considerably longer for pupils to acquire sufficient English to use for academic purposes. In addition, the range of abilities in English may be such that some pupils would require less English tuition than others to survive in English-medium tertiary education. **Therefore, the courses would have to be flexible in length and not of fixed duration.**

In order to ensure minimum acceptable standards in English by the end of the bridging course, a test of language proficiency would need to be developed. **A measure that could be used both prior to the course and at the end, of the same type as the University of Cambridge IELTS test, would provide an assessment on the basis of which decisions could be made regarding learner needs and readiness for English-medium tertiary education. It would, furthermore, provide the business community with a measure of language proficiency when assessing applicants or providing in-service language training.**

(iii) **Maintaining Language Standards at University**

The proposed increase in first-year tertiary places to 15,000 by 1994 poses a danger to future standards of English and, by extension, to the very status of English-medium tertiary education in Hong Kong. This would have repercussions beyond Hong Kong, as the credibility of degrees awarded in Hong Kong would be damaged and inevitably recognition removed. The Education Department may claim this lies outside its sphere of influence, but in the end it is the government which controls the purse-strings. The Education Department must recognize the pervasive effect a decline in English standards in schools would have throughout the whole education system and beyond the shores of Hong Kong. **We therefore recommend to the government that the tertiary institutions be consulted more fully on the ways in which English standards can be maintained if not actually improved.**

1.3. <u>Operational Feasibility</u>

The proposed system of streaming appears extremely difficult to implement for two reasons. First, the number of pupils recommended for English-medium education may fluctuate from year to year, thus making it very difficult for teacher recruitment, i.e. knowing how many staff in a given year will be required to teach through the medium of English. Secondly, there appears to be no provision for the situation where a school finds itself with, say, 55 pupils who attain the required standard for English-medium education. Does the Head decide to split the class into two small classes, thus making the Chinese medium classes larger, or alternatively to have one large class, disadvantaging those pupils who will already be facing the arduous task of acquiring their knowledge through a second language?

Some provision would, as mentioned above, have to be built into the system whereby neighbouring schools would work together or specialize in order to tackle the above problems.

1.4. **Research**

Although it may not be possible for the Education Department to wait until the results of comprehensive research become available, we consider it essential to arrive at a more in-depth understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the present educational system. Of particular interest are the effects of using mixed-code in the classroom and the level of linguistic competence of language teachers in the education system.

(i) **Mixed-Code in the Classroom**

Much is said about the harmfulness of using mixed-code in the classroom, yet there appears to be little empirical evidence to support this. We recognize that while a child is developing, mixed-code may interfere with the child's learning processes, but we should like to see guidelines drawn from empirical data not hearsay. Any such research would, of course, need to distinguish between mixed-code and code-switching since recommendations as to desired classroom behaviours would need to account for both.

(ii) **Linguistic Competence of Teachers**

It is assumed that teachers use mixed-code in the classroom as pupils cannot otherwise understand what they say. This of course may be true. But it may be equally true that teachers have been using mixed-code for so long that they would find it difficult to change. They would therefore need some in-service training as would those teachers required to teach through the medium of English. This has serious implications for budgeting as well as implementation of the recommendations. First, in-service training for all secondary school teachers in Hong Kong would be very expensive and we see little evidence that the Education Department has set aside sufficient funds for this. Secondly, since in-service training would have to be staggered over time, it is possible that many teachers would be required to cope with a situation, at least initially, which they could not handle.

A related question and one which should be given some attention is that of the teaching of Mandarin. It is likely that Mandarin will become increasingly important as 1997 approaches. Will pupils be expected to handle three languages in school, or will they be given the choice of studying either Mandarin or English? Policy decisions on such matters should not be left to 1997, but should be worked out and implemented in conjunction with the proposed changes.

Needs analysis will not provide all the answers to the above questions. However, it should certainly be undertaken to ensure that all decisions are well informed.

1.5. **Concluding Remarks**

Our recommendations in this paper have touched upon how the proposed system can be made more flexible, thus allowing pupils and their parents greater choice and at the same time not disadvantaging those going on to tertiary education. We suggest that though moving into tertiary education is a prime consideration, the language needs of all school leavers as well as the psychological implications of all the proposed changes, especially that of streaming at Secondary school, should be taken into account And on this basis we argue that the strengthening of

teaching English as a language is a crucial step towards achieving the objective of better overall educational standards.

The implications for tertiary education of the report are enormous and whatever the final recommendations are, they will have a substantial impact on the work done by the tertiary institutions. It is therefore with much concern that we note the limited brief of the working party who compiled this report. They should, in our opinion, not have been limited to the school system, but should have sought the advice and opinions of the tertiary institutions. We believe that it is only with the close co-operation of these institutions that any such changes can be designed in such a way that they are really workable and we hope that in the next phase of consultation the Education Department will take this into account. We also recognize that the business community of Hong Kong should have a say in language policy and we would like to recommend that a cross-institutional Language Planning Unit with representatives from the Education Department, Tertiary Institutions and Professional Bodies be set up to coordinate and implement any agreed changes.

There will no doubt be a great deal of work to do once the consultation period is over. This, we hope will be undertaken by an independent body of people who will be able to distance themselves from the original work of compiling the document and will objectively be able to take on board some of the suggestions and proposals put forward to the Education Department. Fears have been raised that existing proposals have tended to pre-empt consideration of such questions as to which institutions should carry out the various measures under discussion and what resources they would require to do this successfully.

We end this response on a note of caution. Any major changes like the ones under discussion take time to implement and rushed decisions could result in failure. Yet, a well-founded and established education system must be in operation by 1997.

Part Two: Round-Table Discussion of the Language Centre's Response to the Education Department's Report on Language Improvement Measures.

2.0. During an informal discussion between Dr John Clark of the ILE and a number of Language Centre staff of HKU, some interesting points were raised with regard to the Language Centre's response to the Education Department's report on language improvement measures.

2.1. An Independent Enquiry?

In its response to the report, the Language Centre recommended the setting up of:

> an independent body of people who will be able to distance themselves from the original work of compiling the document and will objectively be able to take on board some of the suggestions and proposals put forward to the Education Department.

The reason for the recommendation was the fear that the Education Department might tend to be overprotective of its findings.

This Dr Clark rejected as unrealistic since the Government was likely to want to play a role in further consultations, as well as in the implementation of generally agreed recommendations. In

addition, he argued, the setting up of an independent body would be wasteful as it would not be drawing on the expertise gathered by the Working Party in compiling the report.

After some discussion it was agreed that an 'independent look' at the findings and submissions would portray a more accurate and realistic picture of what should be the aims of the next stage of the evaluation process.

2.2. **Advantaging or Disadvantaging?**

A major area of concern expressed in the Language Centre's response was that the proposed system would intensify elitism in schools. Though it was felt that this problem could not be overcome, Dr Clark observed that it would be better to talk about 'advantaging and disadvantaging' rather than elitism, since within the secondary school system it would advantage students at all levels of academic ability to study through their mother tongue, whereas the reverse would appear to be true after secondary education: those receiving English-medium education and able to deal with it successfully would seem to be advantaged because of job opportunities and easier access to tertiary education. Thus to minimise the disadvantage for the Chinese-medium pupils, it would be crucial to provide a sufficiently lengthy bridging programme to enable students to be able to cope with an English-medium tertiary education. This appeared indisputable, yet concern about the length of such a programme was raised by Language Centre staff on two counts: how would an additional year of study be perceived? could we guarantee that one year was the optimum time to reach the desired standard?

In answer to the first question, Dr Clark pointed out that 40-50% of examinees at HKCE are repeaters who have failed to attain the necessary standard to continue their education. These students are already having to do an extra year and are clearly prepared to do so when necessary. It is likely that many of these repeaters could handle the material cognitively but fail because of linguistic difficulties.

The second question was more problematic since the standard of English necessary for work or for study at one of the polytechnics would not necessarily be the same as for university. However, if Grade D at Use of English was the minimum requirement for university, it would appear that nothing less than a year's bridging programme would be sufficient.

One further point that was acknowledged by all was that if the proposals were to work, there was a need to strengthen the Chinese-medium curriculum so that Chinese-medium education (textbooks, examinations, etc.) would become in practice as enriching as English-medium education.

2.3. **Post Secondary Bridging at School or University?**

Another problem raised was that of the status of the bridging programme. Would it be conceived as a 'foundation year' whereby the students would be regarded as members of the university? This would appear to have advantages for maintaining peer contact between products of the two streams. But the question of failing if a minimum standard were not achieved would arise. On the one hand, it would be undesirable for students automatically to graduate from this year regardless of the level of English they attained. On the other hand, if there were a high failure rate, students would perceive this year as a waste of time. However, Dr Clark pointed out that the situation would be no different to that when students go abroad to study. Students entering British universities, for example, are required to demonstrate a minimum level of language proficiency and if they do not satisfy this requirement, they have to undergo language training, failure in which bars access to degree study.

The question for Dr Clark was much more one of where the bridging programme should be held--at the university or in separate Language Colleges. The advantage of giving students a provisional acceptance at university and placing the bridging course within the institution they would be studying at, is that the courses could be tailor-made to suit the needs of the accepting faculty. Yet if Language Colleges were set up, they could cater for a greater variety of post-secondary needs offering not only courses for university entrance, but also for work, the polytechnics, etc.

2.4. **Fixed Menu or a la Carte?**

Perhaps the factor that concerned some of the Language Centre staff most was the 'all or nothing' approach to English suggested in the proposals. Would it not be possible to increase the amount of exposure to English as pupils went through their Chinese-medium schooling by introducing some new subject(s) such as science or environmental science in English? This Dr Clark considered undesirable as it would require a bridging course at a point in the education system where there was no time for it, it would encourage the use of mixed-code and thus depress the academic standard attained in the subject, it would make teacher-training more or less impossible, and it would ultimately have only a negligible effect on pupil's performance in English. However, Language Centre staff felt that studying one or more subjects through the medium of English would help prepare students for post-secondary bridging and would thus have a positive spin-off on the pupils' educational development.

Acknowledgements

This paper is an outcome of a series of discussions involving all members of the Language Centre of HKU. I would like to thank all contributors, especially Nigel Bruce, for their invaluable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of the paper.

REFERENCE

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EL2-MEDIUM EDUCATION IN A LARGELY MONOLINGUAL SOCIETY: THE CASE OF HONG KONG

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* * * * *

English is used as a second-language (EL2) medium of instruction in a wide range of developing countries, notably in East and South Asia, the Middle East and many parts of Africa, and often in the face of a vigorous resurgence of indigenous and regional cultures and languages. This paper first discusses and illustrates some of the social, political and educational factors which make the implementation of such "EL2"-medium educational policies so problematic for developing countries. It then looks into the case of Hong Kong, with its peculiar linguistic and socio-political situation, and the implications of an EL2-medium education system for an ostensibly egalitarian education policy. The paper concludes by examining recent attempts by language planners and educationists in Hong Kong, at both secondary and tertiary levels, to make the education system more responsive to the sociolinguistic and educational requirements and realities in the territory, while still retaining a strong EL2-medium profile.

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I. Introduction

In Hong Kong, EL2-medium education has long been a burning issue, inflaming passions among parents, teachers, schoolchildren, educationists and politicians. The issue is often reduced to questions like: "How necessary is EL2-medium education in Hong Kong?" and "Does it fit the real needs of society and of the vast majority of the young people of Hong Kong?". But this is not a problem confined to Hong Kong. Throughout the developing world, particularly in the Middle and Far East and in many parts of Africa, people have been asking: "How necessary is ("foreign") L2-medium education in the developing world, and how well does it fit that world's needs?", or simply: "Why not L1-medium education ?" and "How do these "foreign" languages come to assume such influence in the developing world ?".

The so-called "developing" world is generally pursuing that development in the wake or shadow of some form of colonial influence, and often seeking to emulate that power, or at least its economic and technological infrastructure. A feature of the ebb and flow of tribal fortunes has been the imposition of the languages of invading 'outgroups' and those languages' assumption of a role of prestige and pre-eminence; mastery of such languages typically becomes a pre-requisite to social, economic and political advancement. This has continued to be the case even after nominal independence and the "casting off of the yoke", as power on independence was generally passed on to an elite inculcated with the values of the departing colonial culture.

Language in Society

Widdowson (1982) has drawn an interesting portrayal of the role of language in society. He depicts a Janusian dichotomy of forces at work in human nature: an outward-looking, *cooperative* imperative which accounts for what he calls man's "questing" instinct, and an inward-looking *territorial* imperative, which accounts for man's "homing" instinct. The linguistic implications are that the cooperative imperative shapes language to enable reciprocal access between ingroup and outgroup territories, while the territorial imperative tends to shape language to reinforce solidarity *within* a community; this latter "homing" aspect is directed *against* outgroup cooperation. Examples of ingroup consolidation are, at an intranational level, dialects and, intracommunally, slang, the latter more expressly designed to exclude, or

at least preclude mutual comprehension with and by, "strangers" - in the shape of threatening authority, etc.. In this way, Widdowson argues, language comes not only to convey a communal reality or culture but also to represent it, i.e. not only communicating what you mean, but also what it means to be a member of your group; the mere fact of its use declares allegiances and antipathies and the limits of cooperation.

2. A Bilingual Society

Language Attitudes in Hong Kong

The implications of the above scenario for this study are apparent if one looks at the many sociolinguistic studies on language attitude and performance conducted in Hong Kong over the past 15 years. Even with a predominantly EL2-medium education system and the strong profile English has in Hong Kong as the prestige language of government, the level of English here is surprisingly low, even among the university elite. Studies done at Chinese University (Fu 1975) and in the secondary schools (e.g. So 1984) suggest that these problems have less to do with curricula, classroom methodology or the quality of teaching, and more to do with *ethnolinguistic attitudes* and the perceived roles and values of the ingroup and outgroup communities and their languages. In Hong Kong, the estimated 95% Cantonese-L1 population[1] have what Giles & Johnson (1987: 72) term a "positive" ethnolinguistic identity, in that they tend to:

1. maintain their ethnolinguistic identity
2. diverge from outgroup speakers
3. resist acquiring fluency in English (the "outgroup" language)
4. keenly maintain use of their ethnic language within the family and close social context

Some studies (Pierson 1987, Pierson *et al* 1987) have shown that students in Hong Kong have ambivalent attitudes to English, whose status as the language of government and good jobs engenders in them a sense of inferiority. Set against this inferiority is pride in what are perceived as a great Chinese civilisation and an internationally prestigious language. Wong (1984) describes the resulting tension and conflict when the foreign language, English, is foisted onto the Chinese child in the majority of Hong Kong's secondary schools.

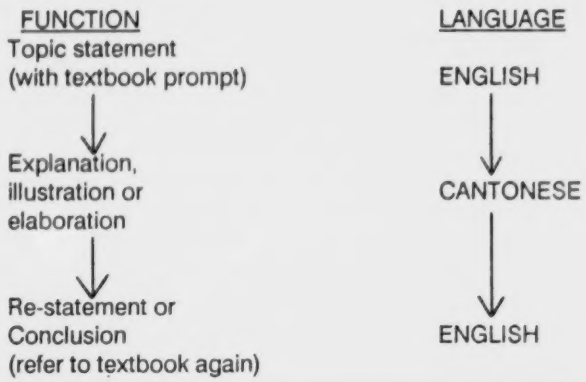
Wong identified a complex ethnolinguistic code developed by students at Hong Kong University. In response to the one explicit rule that students make formal responses to the teacher in English, implicit rules were developed: in individual student-teacher interaction the student should hesitate in response and make no display of verbal prowess or enthusiasm when using English; in peer interaction, any use of English would be seen as an affectation of superiority. Cheung (1984) suggests that English has become more a symbol of power than a means of communication.

L1 and L2 in Hong Kong: Roles and Uses

Wang (1988) throws an interesting slant on this problem, and brings this paper round to some implications for language planning and teaching, and the question of what English we should be teaching in an EL2-medium system and with what objectives. Wang distinguishes the roles of Cantonese and Modern Standard (written) Chinese (MSC) as those of "*mother tongue and father language*", the one soft, familiar and reassuring, the other stern, harsh and forbidding. Having compared the complementary spoken and written native language codes with the respective, and equally complementary, parental roles in the child's home, Wang then makes the analogy between English and MSC; both are formal codes taught for purposes only dimly perceived by the schoolchild, and their constant assessment by examination makes them all the more forbidding.

The school "community" seems to have long since arrived at an unofficial compromise, and there is a high incidence of code-switching, between English and Cantonese, in most of the Anglo-Chinese secondary schools nowadays (in Hong Kong now only around 10% of secondary schools are Chinese medium). Johnson *et al* (1985) showed that on average there was actually more Cantonese spoken than English, and that, beyond the terminological level, the switching tended to occur according to function shift. For example, in the expository mode predominating in subject teaching, the most common pattern was as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Patterns of code-switching in the Hong Kong classroom (after Johnson et al, 1985)



Johnson *et al* and also Lin (1988) report on the positive humanistic role of this code-switching, and its educational necessity when even *with* code-switching at least 30% of the schoolchildren have difficulty following their EL2-medium curriculum. Kwo (1987) suggests that these students are often so poor in English that they switch *off* when the teacher switches to English.

This brings us to the question "Why not switch completely to Cantonese-medium instruction ?". This argument has recently been critically explored by So (1988), with reference to the distinction Cummins (1979) makes between "basic interpersonal communication skills"(BICS) and the "cognitive-academic langauge proficiency"(CALP) functions of language. So points out that the Cantonese used to perform CALP functions "in the legislative council, in lower courts, as well as the medium of formal discourse in administration, education, academia and business" is "high" Cantonese which, since most local people's mother tongue is *low* Cantonese, is rarely used in ordinary, non-formal social discourse. This indicates a CALP/BICS-type diglossic distribution of high and low Cantonese, and leaves us with the implication that Cantonese children will experience a disjunction between home and school (and subsequent professional) linguistic environments, whether the school medium is English or Chinese, and regardless of whether Putonghua enters the picture.

L1 and L2: "Functional Complementarity"?

Instead, then, of considering the L1 and L2 in terms of dichotomies, it might be more profitable to set them within a framework of co-habitation and interdependence. Prabhu (1987) points to a "functional complementarity" of the L1 and L2 in communities such as Hong Kong, where the ingroup dialect or regional language cedes certain communicative domains to the L2 somewhere along the BICS-CALP spectrum. As we have seen, even within these domains there is likely to be code-switching according to function shift or lexical economy, so we can perhaps characterise the L1-L2 relationship as language codes complementing each other along a number of sociological dimensions. Figure 2 offers a speculative range of possible dimensions influencing language use and choice.

Figure 2: Factors influencing L1 or L2 choice in the diglossic context of Hong Kong

L1		*L2*
CANTONESE		*MOD. STANDARD CHINESE*
(Low ?	*So (1988)*	*High Cantonese?)*
		ENGLISH
Spoken		*Written*
Mother Tongue		*Father Language*
(Dialect)		*(Standard)*
informal		*formal*
BICS		*CALP*
warm, friendly		*cold, forbidding*
pleasure		*duty*
ingroup-oriented		*outgroup-oriented*
territorial		*cooperative*
integrative		*instrumental*
social domains		*professional domains*
restricted	*(ideational)*	*elaborate*
elaborate	*(interpersonal)*	*restricted*

3. EL2-Medium Education

L2-medium and the Question of Educational Deficit

When peoples and their languages come into contact, then, the sociological imperatives promoting accommodation or resistance engender ambivalent attitudes not only to the outgroup L2, but also to the L1 itself. But in addition to the evidence of *affective* detriment, we are faced with evidence of the possibility that schoolchildren in an FL-medium educational programme risk significant *cognitive* deficit.

Little is known about the extent and influence of language transfer, and measuring cognitive deficit in isolation from affective/attitudinal factors has proved extremely problematic. Lambert (1977) attempted to characterise the relationship between an L1 and L2 in a bilingual education system in terms of 'additive' and 'subtractive' bilingualism. It is the 'vitality' of the languages concerned, & the perceived prestige of the L2 in relation to the L1, which help determine whether a programme has 'subtractive' effects on the L1, producing a situation in which children leave the system with less than native-like competence in both the L2 and their L1, and with a measurable degree of educational deficit. Lambert concluded that there was probably a 'threshold' of adequate fluency in both L1 and L2 below which educational deficit from L2-medium education was likely to occur.

There is considerable research indicating that bilingual fluency, perhaps through what Lambert & Tucker (1972) call 'incipient contrastive linguistics', has positive educational effects, including raised metalinguistic awareness - how the language operates in semantic coding and sensitivity to verbal interpersonal feedback cues - and superior verbal and non-verbal ability (Cummins & Gulutsan, 1974). Cummins & Swain (1986) quote Vygotsky's (1962: 110) suggestion that the ability to express the same thought in different languages enables a child to " see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, which leads to awareness of his linguistic operations". There is increasing support for the theory (e.g. Barik & Swain, 1976) that the attainment of high levels of L2 skills is associated with greater cognitive growth. However, Lambert points out that most of the findings of this type are drawn from 'additive' bilingual programmes, where the L1 is dominant, prestigious and under no threat from any L2, and where the students have attained a CALP-type competence in both L1 and L2. In the real world, if the L2 is dominant in these terms, success stories for L1 minorities are likely to conceal compensatory factors. Zepp (1988), for example, offers the speculation

that one of the reasons for the high success of many Chinese children in the American education system is their parent's insistence that they attend Chinese school in the evening after their English medium instruction has ended. At the other end of the scale are the reports of subtractive bilingualism in Hispanic communities in the U.S. where verbal IQ scores were 14 points below performance IQ, and "concrete intelligence,...measured in performance tests, is observed to have partially replaced abstract intelligence as the dominant coping strategy to handle the academic linguistic shortcomings" (Ramirez, 1987: 97).

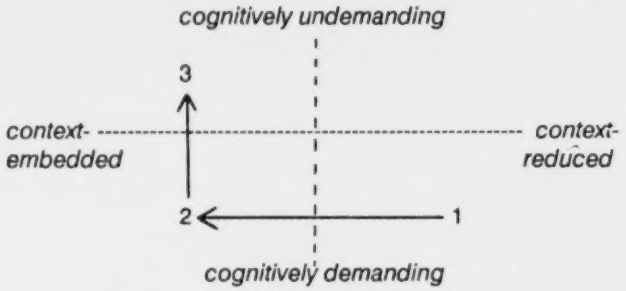
Contextual comparability, then, is critical, particularly on the basic issue of whether the L2 in question is the L1 of an indigenous majority, the L1 of an indigenous or immigrant minority or, more relevant to the context of the developing world, is a 'language of wider use'. Such languages tend to be adopted either as a 'neutral' solution in a multilingual society, or as a medium of education more likely to hasten a nation's integration into the international technological and educational community - though Hong Kong's case reflects more individualistic aspirations, founded on the self-help philosophy for which the Territory is noted. There is a danger, then, that language planners in developing countries will succumb to 'confirmation bias' when surveying the literature for examples of successful bilingual programmes. Particular care should be taken in drawing any conclusions from the many, often heavily-funded, studies of language programmes for indigenous or immigrant minorities, notably in Wales, USA & Australia. (See also van Lier, 1988: 5-9). And while the Canadian French immersion programmes, for children of a dominant anglophone majority, are cited extensively for their relevance to the Hong Kong situation, in fact they offer only superficial parallels. While the methodology may be worth examining for its generalisability to many other bilingual contexts, its 'nation-building' dimension has little relevance for a largely monolingual territory like Hong Kong[2], in which the L2 educational medium (English) is, for the reasons given above, the educational medium for 90% of the secondary school population.

More relevant studies concern those countries in the Third World - the majority - who are experiencing a post-colonial search for ethnolinguistic identity (see Zepp, 1989: 162). Even here, many countries - Singapore, India, Nigeria - have a multilingual profile, and hence an education system which where the L2 - usually English or French - becomes a neutral lingua franca, generally for the quite understandable political reason of preserving inter-ethnic harmony. Nevertheless, these are contexts where the L2 is a language of wider use but is the vernacular of at most a small minority of the population. Hong Kong has a monolingual profile, in which the L1 vernacular, Cantonese, has been popularly rejected as an educational medium because it does not open the same doors to status, security and wealth. The following study is illustrative of this kind of context.

The Inuit language of the Inuit Eskimos in the Canadian context was regarded by language planners in much the same way as the vernacular language in a colony of one of the declining empires. Mackay (1988), after 2 years spent working with the Inuit Eskimos of north-eastern Canada, reports educational deficit as a result of a Canada-wide curriculum being imposed on a tribe sharing few of the cultural or economic assumptions or aspirations which the (English-medium) curriculum was based on and designed to meet. The subject teachers ended up settling for a tolerable learning environment as their prime objective; Mackay characterises this compromise as the institution of a "hygiene rule", the teachers simplifying activities and materials so as to minimise embarassment in the classroom. This reduction of work to a cognitively undemanding level led to students becoming trapped in a deprived learning environment where they never learned the necessary cognitive skills. Mackay illustrates the "reductionist" process in Figure 3 overleaf.

The 'hygienic' approach cannot mask the subtractive nature of this type of bilingual education programme, and it is quite possible that the "tail" in Hong Kong's Anglo-Chinese schools are sharing the Inuktitut experience. Even if the motivation is there, we have to consider the possibility of cognitive deficit arising from a policy of avoiding the L1 as principal medium of instruction. Herb Clark states the problem thus:

Figure 3: The "hygiene rule": reducing cognitive demands & embarrassment in the classroom



(Key: 1 - 3: stages in the reduction process)

> Many reasoning problems are not due to cognitive processes specific to these problems, but to the very language in which the problems are stated. (Clark, 1977:112-3).

The hazards of running an L2-medium programme which neglects L1 development are suggested in Zepp's quote from Lemon (1981):

> material learned in an L2 may not be directly available in the same form when the individual is forced to operate in his L1, thus further reducing the relevance of the knowledge he has acquired (in) his formal education. (Zepp, 1988)

Kvan goes as far as to suggest, of the switch to L2-medium education in lower secondary, that:

> this reduction of possibilities for expression would cause a neurosis fully as severe as the one we find in children backward in reading and writing. (Kvan, 1969: 334)

Language planners are increasingly questioning the validity of choosing a 'language of wider use' over a national language of however limited a regional or international currency. Unfortunately, there is little consonance between political and ethnolinguistic boundaries in the developing world. And given the plurality of languages in many such societies, one can see why language planners are reluctant to promote the principle of vernacular education for all. Nonetheless, one should caution against sacrificing educational principle on the 'altar' of economic and political expediency. There are many who believe that it is vernacular and not 'prestige L2' education which will bring the mass of children in the developing world to a higher level of intellectual attainment. In a 1974 study of Ghanaian schoolchildren studying science, Collison reported that the children functioned at a higher conceptual level in their vernacular than in English, and offered the tentative conclusion that education exclusively in a foreign language denies a sizeable proportion of schoolchildren appropriate conceptual experience[3]. His recommendation was that local languages can and should replace the colonial language; he quotes Pattison's (1962) suggestion that, given time, *any* language becomes able to cope with the main communicative needs of its community. Pattison cites the example of English itself, which only in 1362 replaced French as the language of Parliament and the law courts, and not until 1700 was accepted as a fitting medium for the proceedings of the Royal Society, then (interestingly) preoccupied with the development of an English style suitable for scientific discourse.

4. EL2-Medium Education in Hong Kong

In the light of the above sociolinguistic and educational discussion of bilingualism, we turn to the problems of education in Hong Kong, first at the secondary level, and then at the tertiary level. As we have noted, schools in Hong Kong are largely (90%) English-medium. This is mainly due to the pressure of parents, who perceive that an English-medium education will guarantee a more lucrative and secure future for their children. Such a high demand for a language which enjoys minimal social currency inevitably leads to problems. The desire for an English-medium education in Hong Kong has for some time outstripped the ability of so many of the territory's children to obtain a satisfactory education in English. The education system is similarly unable to furnish the schools with the requisite number of teachers able to teach their subjects wholly and effectively in that medium. The result, as we have also noted, is a *modus vivendi* in the classroom whereby most children receive a 'mixed code' education and yet are still expected to pass English-medium A-level exams to enter English-medium tertiary education.

Over the last 3 decades, there has been a series of education commission reports and, most recently, a report on the role of language in education in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government, 1989). With the prospect looming of reintegration into China, the structure of L2-medium education is once again being reviewed. The following changes have taken, or are scheduled to take place:

a) *1987*: introduction of a new, revised Use of English exam, oriented more to CALP-type skills
b) *1989*: the introduction of AS levels, an attempt to broaden the 6th form curriculum, the better to develop students' cognitive and communicative skills
c) *1992*: the planned introduction of Chinese-medium A-levels, grades to be indistinguishable from their English-medium equivalent; the Use of English grade will suffice as the sole measure of linguistic aptitude for tertiary education.
d) *1995*: over the 5 years 1990-95, Hong Kong's tertiary education intake is currently scheduled to double from 7,500 to 15,000.

These last proposed changes, if implemented, will certainly have major implications for tertiary education in Hong Kong, both in terms of the quality of education, and in the level of English competence of the average entrant. It is in the light of such a policy that one must interpret the current Education Department proposal (*op. cit.*) to stream schools into L1 (Cantonese) and L2 (English)- medium bands. The reasons for this move are clear, and in line with Collison's findings elsewhere: a significant number of schoolchildren are being put through a severely 'subtractive' bilingual education system, in which they are failing to gain a proper education (see also Gibbons, 1989). Estimates vary as to the proportion of pupils sufficiently disadvantaged to require instruction in their L1 all the way up to A-level. The clear preference of Hong Kong parents for EL2-medium secondary education shows no sign of changing in the run-up to reunification with China. Just recently (1990), one secondary school was forced by parental and teacher pressure to abandon its L1-medium status only 3 years after its principal stood out for the principle of mother-tongue education. That school had been academically successful; once ambitious parents began taking their children elsewhere, the school's academic profile suffered, and teacher and parent pressure has now resulted in the school having to return to English-medium instruction. The principal remains unrepentant but realistic; parents are less concerned with the substance of 'an education' than with the currency a good diploma or degree offers. There seems to be little sympathy in Hong Kong for a policy of helping the less fortunate at the expense of ensuring the opportunity to attain the best possible outcome for one's own children.

The attraction of an English-medium secondary school education is, as has been said, partly that it will ensure a more lucrative future in the form of better jobs (in Hong Kong or abroad). It will also offer a stronger profile in any application to emigrate and, most importantly, it will open the door to higher education. These are powerful reasons for a public insisting, against the judgement of many educationists, on an English-medium education system. Faced with this reality, educationists are then faced with the task of seeking a language planning compromise whereby educational and popular objectives can both be met;

specifically, they have become concerned with the questions of what *kind* of English should be taught in an EL2-medium system, and *when* and *how* it might be most beneficially phased in to the curriculum.

What English for What Purposes ?

It seems clear that English has a negligible social role to play in everyday Hong Kong life; it only has communicative currency in the technological, academic and, above all, the international commercial sectors. Johnson (1988) proposes teaching a form of "International English" (IE) designed for people and nations who do not use English as a community or national language. The role model for IE learners would be bilinguals within the learner's own culture and not members of some other, alien culture.

This thesis is a strong version of an increasingly popular view that in a monolingual society like Hong Kong with an L1 of high vitality but fragile identity in the wider socio-political context, the most acceptable and pragmatic policy would be a utilitarian one, focusing on CALP rather than BIC skills, which are the province of the mother tongue. This view holds that the overt teaching of "BICS English" is likely to meet with a negative ethnolinguistic reaction, while the less culturally-bound CALP (English) language will not meet that problem. By introducing CALP-style English to the schoolchild when (s)he can perceive its instrumental benefit, the "medicinal" quality of the dose (of the "father language") will provoke less resentment in the pupils and less hostility from advocates of mother-tongue education. The new Use of English exam certainly works on that premise, with its emphasis on the language of study and the workplace.

EL2- Medium in Hong Kong's Secondary Schools

This brings us to the second question of *when* and *how* to phase in English-medium instruction. In both 1963 (after the Marsh Sampson Education Commission Report) and 1973 (Education Green Paper), the government strongly advocated a change to L1-medium instruction in the first 3 years of secondary education, but had to back down in the face of public opposition (Gibbons, 1989: 126-7). More recently, there has been further evidence of the goverment's desire to ensure a better education for the linguistically less versatile in the Education Department's (1989) proposal to 'stream' schools into English and Chinese-medium streams. While this proposal is intended to offer a choice of medium in a wider range of schools, it indicates a lack of sensitivity to the sociological implications of dividing schools into prestige- and non-prestige-medium streams, and of assigning children definitively to these streams from the outset of secondary school. The proposed 'bridging' year of intensive English study after sitting Chinese-medium A-levels will set back a child's education by a full year, while the success of such a scheme remains to be tested. Once again, one has to be careful in seeking precedents which are truly relevant and comparable.

An option which seems to have been rejected, yet which might have been seen as allowing families and their children greater flexibility and responsibility in determining their goals and aspirations, is to phase in English-medium subjects in a flexible programme, according not only to criteria of cognitive and institutional requirements, but also to the children's tolerance thresholds and their perceptions of its relevance. One model which attempts to ensure that L1 and L2 develop in harmony, and according to the above principles, is based on the '*concurrent*' bilingual education policy proposed by Daniel So (1987, 1988), which abandons the notion of 'sequential monolingual tracking', advocating instead a more flexible 'a la carte' menu which starts offering L2-medium subjects as early as primary school[4]. The scheme outlined overleaf (Figure 4) is based on his suggestions, though it does not advocate L2-*medium* instruction before secondary school.

In this model, one subject is taught in the medium of English from Year 2 of secondary, and a range of options is introduced at age 14 according to desired future specialisation. This would encourage the present trend for large schools to offer parallel English and Chinese-medium classes in a number of subjects, but would add the vital element of pupil *choice*. The existence for both streams of a mandatory subject taught in the medium of English would ensure an emphasis on English not only as a subject but as

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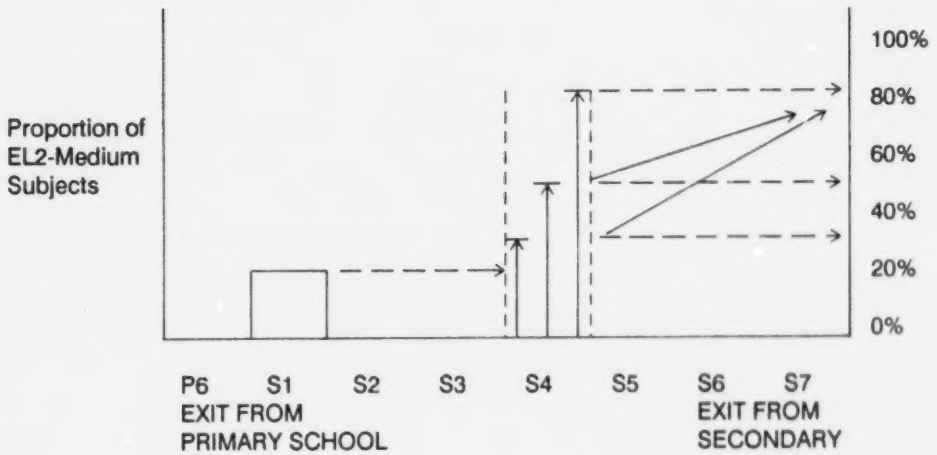
a learning *medium*, and on building CALP-type skills. As an instrumentally-transparent medium of access to information, English CALP skills would be *used* rather than simply deductively learned. The option to increase the number of English-medium subjects from Form 4 might be more motivating to the child, since such subjects would be *selected* by that child for his or her own instrumental purposes.

Figure 4: A model for individualised switching to EL2-medium instruction



Let us now consider two areas of objection to this kind of proposal: pedagogical and logistic. Pedagogically, serious reservations are sometimes expressed over the idea that sufficient 'mastery' of an academic subject can be obtained when switching medium at age 14 or 15. The territory's A-level attainment criteria tend to be framed in terms of tertiary entrance requirements, resulting in a monolithic examination system which could not accommodate such changes and which would militate against Chinese-medium pupils gaining tertiary entrance results in such a competitive system as Hong Kong's (even though the tertiary population is to be doubled over the next 5 years). On the other hand, the proposal described above would meet an important Hong Kong imperative of providing freedom of opportunity - however tough the competition - and would also fit the 'interdependence principle' proposed by Cummins (1979: 23): "the level of L2 competence that a bilingual child attains is partially a function of the type of competence the child has developed in L1 at the time when extensive exposure to L2 begins". This is a principle gaining in support in bilingual education circles, and supported by studies which show not only that it is possible to "promote additive bilingualism among minority children who are academically at risk", but that such programmes can successfully develop academic skills "despite the fact that students receive less exposure to English than in monolingual English programmes" (Cummins & Swain, 1986, 86-87).

Logistically, it is sometimes argued that the school system could not cope with the unpredictability of demand that would result from passing such control into the hands of the 'consumer'. The idea that the pooling of resources by schools in each area (by dividing up areas of specialisation & so economising on staff resources) could provide the necessary flexibility has been met by a sceptical response: schools in Hong Kong are in the business of competing rather than collaborating with each other, and each has its own religious, educational or socio-economic profile which sets it apart from its neighbours. Yet it remains debatable whether there are indeed any actual *logistical* impediments to moving children around between

2 or 3 schools, or to schools offering courses to children from neighbouring schools. Certainly, there are no such problems after hours when the serious business gets under way of hosting evening and weekend supplementary crammer courses for all comers.

5. EL2-Medium: Implications for tertiary education

Teaching and Learning at University

While Hong Kong secondary school students may have linguistic problems, as evidenced by their Use of English grades, sufficient numbers to fill the available tertiary places do nevertheless obtain the necessary pass grades in the English-medium A-levels. They do this despite their linguistic shortcomings, but while one can applaud their resourcefulness, one cannot applaud the type of strategies the system is content to let them develop to a high art. Memorisation and the learning of lists of facts are the strategies which the students know pay off; the system currently offers little incentive to students to develop the skills of argumentation, analysis, application and transfer of knowledge, and creative and individual thought and speculation. The result of this severely biased intellectual development is that students enter tertiary education with educational problems which, while they have largely arisen from an accommodation to an EL2-medium system, by now manifest themselves in much more diverse ways.

In brief, the incoming students' shortcomings can be paraphrased as 'rhetorical and rational' in nature - the students arrive with neither the linguistic nor argumentative, analytical or synthetic abilities necessary to take full advantage of a university education[5]. Evidence for this phenomenon is largely anecdotal or from questionnaire feedback; university staff have, for example, found the same verbatim passage repeated in dozens of exam scripts, stretching relevance to the question asked to the extreme. Biggs (1989: 434-5) does caution against labelling Hong Kong learners as having a purely 'surface-achieving' approach to their education, but a later study (Gow, 1989), using the same research instrument, showed an *increase* in this surface approach to study as students progressed through 3 years of polytechnic study. Findings such as these only reinforce the experience of tertiary language trainers in Hong Kong, who feel that the point has been reached when EL2-medium tertiary institutions, particularly the universities, need to re-examine the assumptions they make about the aptitudes and abilities of incoming students, and about what their own fundamental educational objectives and curricular demands should be.

Even today, teaching at most universities worldwide is education by example and inspiration. It is essentially non-interventionist and laissez-faire, prescriptive only in the syllabus imposed and the standards and criteria of attainment set - though even these often remain opaque to students. The process is ruthlessly selective and causes much heartache among students - and that is a description of an *L1* University; it is not difficult to imagine the results of the emulation of this kind of ethos and operational structure in an EL2-system, such as we see in Hong Kong. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that universities pay only lip service to the importance of good teaching; promotion is invariably decided on the basis of publications and proven scholarship.

The low status of teaching competence has institutional ramifications. Academic staff are not expected to have any educational training, are rarely offered any, and certainly have no material incentive to acquire any. They are expected to be able to teach, but only in the sense of having the minimal competence necessary to transmit the knowledge that they acquired by the same process. More understandably, but crucially negligent in the EL2-medium context, academic staff receive not even rudimentary training in language acquisition or teaching. As a result, language trainers are too often resigned to expecting a lack of understanding of the problems the student body faces and hence a lack of cooperation.

The message needs to be put across clearly that the business of the language-training arm of EL2-medium tertiary institutions like HKU lies increasingly in the teaching of study skills, and in task-orientation,

self-directed learning and subject-study relevance. The Language Centres and English Departments of such institutions need *greater* cooperation from subject discipline teachers than ever. Unfortunately, they are often perceived to be encroaching on subject departments' academic domains and, at the internal political level, the requests they make for resources to continue and improve their work are often seen as extravagant.

The crucial problem would seem to lie in academic perceptions of the educational process and the conflation of *learning* with *teaching*. A number of academic staff are becoming aware of a language problem, but the response of the majority seems to be to retreat further into the transmission approach, following a textbook closely and, perhaps operating Mackay's 'hygiene rule', simplifying their lecture presentation and lowering their expectations of student performance. When assessing student assignments, staff have confessed to sifting out the relevant information rather atomistically, and to glossing over inadequacies of clarity, organisation and the relationship of ideas. The "transmission" format is not only used in the lecture halls, but also in the "tutorials", often of 20 to 30 students. It is small wonder that the language of tutorials has increasingly become the "friendly" mother tongue, with the students' one ploy to divert the proceedings to a more informal explanatory mode being to resort to Cantonese.

Recommendations and Prospects

At Hong Kong University, there are currently (1990) reassuring signs that this type of situation is to be remedied. The University first made public in 1988 its diagnosis that there was a 'lack of fit' between school and university, and its detailed prescription for an additional 'Foundation' year to remedy many of the problems described above (Hong Kong University, 1988). After much debate, this proposal was vetoed by the Government as too costly. Since then, the University has prepared more economical proposals for *foundation studies* - including the development of critical thinking skills, *broadening* courses to stretch students' intellectual horizons, and an *induction* programme for new students, to ensure that they receive an orientation to the essence of a university education. A heartening aspect of these proposals is that it is the academic staff themselves who have been identified as responsible for the gestation and teaching of each of these programmes. It is this type of response which can make fullest use of an institution's applied linguistic expertise to help remove both linguistic and institutional obstructions to communicative and intellectual development.

One dimension of EL2-medium academic communications programmes which has significance for the rest of the university curriculum is that of providing the opportunity for student-centred activity and behavioural reinforcement of new messages - whether principles, theories or problems. Activities of this kind, as Biggs and Telfer (1987) say, help "link the content being learned with existing knowledge, provide cross-links between different methods of encoding the material and help students become 'metacognitive', or aware of their own learning processes".

If such ideas and initiatives are to bear fruit, EL2-medium institutions need to become more aware of their distinctive identity, and of the importance of ensuring that sufficient emphasis is placed on the language medium so that it might be most efficiently harnessed to transmit the academic 'message' and to develop those intellectual - analytical, interpretive and argumentative - skills which are the fundamental objectives of a university education. Otherwise we will end up with that common travesty of an L2-medium system, in which the cart, the 'message', is put before the horse, the 'medium'; the students end up pushing both horse and cart up the curricular hill, with Faculty sitting atop urging greater effort. While the analogy may also be overworked, the message is clear: we need to put the horse back in harness, give it proper nutrition, and further lighten the load - by getting off the cart, and down to the perspective of the learner. If L2-medium education fails to adopt a realistic and humanistic approach along these lines, it should forfeit any right to precedence over L1 education.

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NOTES

1. In fact, the picture is a complex one. In Bolton and Luke's survey (publ. 1990) of the Chinese 'land' population (i.e. excluding boat & floating-village dwellers), only 76.45% of respondents gave standard Cantonese as their mother tongue. The other Chinese languages given as L1 were Chiu Chow (2.90%), Mandarin (2.53%), Hakka (2.31%), Hokkien (1.61%) and Yap (1.24%). Although the picture is muddied somewhat by the 7.99% who could only nominate their L1 to be 'Chinese', the figures clearly show that, properly speaking, Hong Kong's Cantonese-L1 population is not quite the figure (95%) normally quoted; this figure should strictly be used to refer to those Hong Kong Chinese who conduct practically all of their social communication in Cantonese (see Note 2).

2. 'Monolingual', as suggested in Note 1, is not a clear-cut concept. In this context, it can be taken to mean 'Cantonese-speaking' in the sense of both the mother tongue character of Hong Kong society, and the Cantonese language's status as the primary language of social communication among all strata of that society. Monolingual is <u>not</u> intended to mean that most Hong Kong Chinese can only speak one language. Bolton and Luke (1990) found, for example, that 32% of the Chinese population claimed an 'active knowledge' of Putonghua (Mandarin).

3. Some of the support for the argument that L2-medium primary education need not inflict any educational disadvantage is again often taken from bilingual contexts - even in the developing world - that are quite different from the Hong Kong one. Wagner *et al.* (1989), for example, cite the case of Berber monolingual children in Morocco catching up with their Arabic-speaking peers by the 5th year of primary school. In explanation, they point out that 'there is no competing literacy in the Berber language', that therefore for these people 'Standard Arabic literacy is the first key to school success' and, above all, that Arabic is the language of Islam, and thus enjoys great acceptance and respect among Berber speakers.

4. There are studies which point in the other direction. Rutherford *et al* (1989) studied Hindi and N. Sotho L1-speaking students' recognition of science concepts in English. Their findings suggested that students exhibited higher recognition levels when using the L2 than when using the vernacular - and showed, incidentally, no evidence of a rote-learning strategy.

5. Wong-Fillmore and Valadez, in an exhaustive survey for the AERA's Handbook of Research on Teaching (1985), report largely positive effects of bilingual programmes at the tertiary level in the U.S.A. They cite, as an example, Kessler and Quinn's (1980) studies of Spanish-English bilinguals, who outperformed monolingual English students in the quality and linguistic complexity of the scientific hypotheses they were asked to formulate and express.

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A PROGRAMME FOR SEMANTICS

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Introduction

A simple and, you might think, almost incontrovertible claim is that human beings frequently say things and mean what they say. This ability may not be the unique possession of humans, but it is striking, something well worth having, and something which those of an enquiring mind would want to investigate. And indeed there are people who do just that, and their investigation is known as *semantics*. But, in recent times, this apparently worthy enterprise has been savagely assaulted. It has been claimed not just that the methods of semanticists are sloppy, nor just that the theories proposed have been facile, but that the very enterprise of theorizing about meaning is misconceived.

The titles of various recently published books give some idea of the nature of the attack: *Language, Sense and Nonsense*, by Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker (1984: 389), attempts to prove that theoretical linguistics is one of the pseudo-sciences of the age, that theories of meaning "are not merely confused, but also lack any purpose". *Remnants of Meaning*, by Stephen Schiffer (1987), argues that when confusion and error have been stripped away from all current theories of meaning, the remainder is zero. *Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?*, by Howard Wettstein (1990), answers 'Yes - a big one'. *The Language Myth*, by Roy Harris (1981), pursues an enquiry which is continued in *The Language Machine* (1987), where it is not so much claimed that semantics is impossible, but that its pretentions to being a *scientific* study must be exposed.

Scepticism about *meaning* really erupted in the early 1950's, the classical document being W.V. Quine's paper 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (Quine 1953). In this paper, Quine argued that no account could be given of *synonymy* without invoking one of a set of mutually interdependent and equally suspect notions such as *analyticity*, *necessity* and *definition*. Now, just as the failure to find an adequate criterion for determining whether two objects have the same *length* would cast doubt on the notion of *length*, so the impossibility of producing a workable account of *sameness of meaning* places the concept of *meaning* in jeopardy. And by 1960, in Chapter 2 of his wonderful book *Word and Object*, Quine had considerably strengthened the assault by arguing that *translation* is radically indeterminate. He undertook to show that one could produce, for a given language, several translation manuals all incompatible with each other, but each compatible with all the possible evidence one could accumulate about the verbal dispositions of speakers of that language. If we consider any sentence of that language and ask 'What is its meaning?', this sounds a pretty silly question if many different, mutually incompatible, translations are available with provably nothing to choose between them.

Wittgenstein (1958: 1-4) enjoined us to ask not for the meaning of an expression but for the use, and Chomsky, like Bloomfield before him, advocated a semantics-free linguistics. There are thus several kinds of scepticism about meaning. Following Desmond Allison, we could formulate those adumbrated above as follows:

1. The very idea of theorizing about meaning is misconceived.

2. Semantics should not be seen as scientific.

3. Semantics should be excluded from linguistics.

Although I regard 3. as the most fantastic of these claims, I shall not be challenging it here. My targets are 1. and 2.. I wish to show that semantics is a respectable pursuit and to outline a programme for its study. This is a new programme, for I share with those authors mentioned in the first paragraph most of their misgivings about the way semantics has been pursued both in the philosophy of language and in theoretical linguistics. I say that the programme is new, but Schiffer (1987) does point in the same direction, and a new book by McGinn (1989) makes what I think is a weighty contribution to the kind of programme I have in mind. Let's begin with a philosophical conundrum.

Kripke's Puzzle

About ten years ago, Saul Kripke presented philosophers with a puzzle that concerns the propositional attitude of *belief* (Kripke 1979). A great virtue of this puzzle is its simplicity. That is to say, one can get into the problem, and be led into contradiction, without straying outside common sense. Principles which intuitively seem quite commonplace and acceptable are seen to generate an absurd conclusion. This implies that, to get *out* of the puzzle one needs to abandon at least one commonsensical principle. And this is what makes it a philosophically interesting problem. It goes deep and forces us to inspect assumptions that we would otherwise carelessly accept. The solution of the puzzle, I shall argue, lies in achieving a proper understanding of the relation of *thinking* to *saying*, and thus has profound bearings on the question of how we mean what we say.

Kripke's story goes something like this. Pierre, an intelligent but monolingual Frenchman living in France, has never been to England. But, on the basis of what others have told him and from seeing pictures in magazines, he concludes that the place called 'Londres' is beautiful. He thus asserts 'Londres est jolie'. Later Pierre goes to England, learns English by the direct method (i.e., without using any translation of English into French), and fetches up in a seedy part of London. None of his new neighbours speak any French, and they, like he, rarely leave the neighbourhood. The months drag by, and, Pierre gets depressed about this town called 'London' in which he is living. He asserts 'London is not pretty'. What Pierre doesn't know is that London = Londres. Were an English-speaking friend of Pierre's to report the views that Pierre held in France, she would say that Pierre believed London to be beautiful. And even if you went up to Pierre now and asked him in French about Londres, he would enthusiastically maintain 'C'est joli', and then perhaps add ruefully 'mais London n'est pas jolie'. Yet Pierre isn't an idiot normally prone to uttering contradictions.

So, does Pierre, or does he not, believe that London is pretty? We should be inclined to say that he *does*. For, when he was living in France he had evidence as good as that of most of his countrymen for so believing and, even now, when speaking French, he speaks highly of the beauty of Londres. We should also be inclined to say that he does not believe London to be pretty. For his evidence for that belief is comparable to that of the Londoners with whom he now lives. So it is not just Pierre who is in danger of falling into contradiction; *we* who are reasoning about him find ourselves inclining towards the contradictory belief that he both does and does not believe London to be pretty.

Contradictory statements and contradictory beliefs

How should this puzzle be tackled? In another paper (Goldstein, 1990), from which the above description of Pierre's predicament is extracted, I have offered a solution. The details of this need not concern us here, but, since I shall make use of the conclusion, I need to provide an outline of the argument.

The first step is to grant that Pierre does make contradictory remarks about London. Roy Harris (private correspondence) is unwilling to grant this, but I think the following consideration is decisive: "It is impossible for the same thing at the same time to belong and not to belong to the same thing and in the same respect." (Aristotle's statement of the Principle of Contradiction at *Metaphysics* Gamma 3, 1005b18-23). "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*). Amalgamating these two undoubtedly true claims, we have: 'It is impossible for the same property at the same time to belong and not to belong to the same object, by whatever name that object is known.' That's why Pierre utters a contradiction when he says 'Londres is pretty, but London is not'. Harris says that one "cannot generate a contradiction out of nothing more than ignorance of an identity". But why he says this eludes me. I should have thought that most of our contradictions arise out of ignorance.

Given Kripke's position that the semantic function of proper names is solely to refer to their referents, it is hard to see how he could escape the conclusion that, when Pierre says 'Londres est jolie et London n'est pas jolie', he is contradicting himself in that he is making opposite claims about the same town. Scott Soames, who also accepts this point, comments that "this just shows that in certain cases one may be in no position to determine the consistency of one's statements" (Soames 1988: 213).

Soames also claims, however, that the same is true of one's beliefs, i.e., that, without making any mistake in logic or reasoning, one may be in no position to determine the consistency of one's beliefs, so, in particular, we shouldn't be too surprised at Pierre's plight. But, when you stop to think about it, this latter claim of Soames's is mistaken. We can certainly concede to Soames that all of us, except those from the planet Vulcan, have beliefs the consequences of which are inconsistent with some of our other beliefs. And those of us who are mentally disturbed have beliefs that we suppress by burying them in the subconscious. But surely if we, as it were, entertain a pair of beliefs side by side at the front of our conscious minds, then we *will be* in a position to tell whether the pair is inconsistent. Otherwise we would not know our own minds (Davidson 1987). So what I'm saying is that there is a great difference between assertions and beliefs in that we can make contradictory 'side by side' *assertions* without being aware of the inconsistency, but that the same does not hold true of *beliefs*. This conclusion clearly has consequences for the notion of *belief*. For one thing, it forces us to reject the view that beliefs or thoughts just are assertions that we haven't bothered to voice.

The structure of language and the structure of thinking

A tradition that dates back at least to Plato holds that thoughts just are unvoiced assertions. Plato described thinking as "the soul's inner dialogue with itself". Whether the medium in which this dialogue is conducted is an inner analogue of a natural language or is a universal 'language of thought' is a topic that has been much debated in the succeeding two thousand years. But, on either view, thought is thought of as having a linguistic structure. In particular, it is held that *concepts* are among the constituents of thoughts and that these are the counterparts of the *predicates* of a language. How do we tell one concept from another, i.e., how are concepts individuated? The generally accepted principle is that if it is possible for a person to simultaneously assert of some object that it is F but not G, then *F* and *G* are different concepts. But now, here comes the crunch. We have seen that it *is* possible simultaneously to assert of some object that it is pretty and not pretty. So, putting this observation together with the above principle, we obtain the conclusion that *pretty* and *pretty* are different concepts. Which, of course, they're not. Therefore we have reduced to absurdity the view that thoughts and beliefs have a structure similar to that of assertions. What we have arrived at is the thesis that the structure of thoughts and beliefs is non-linguistic.

What we are saying, then, is that a thought or belief is *represented* linguistically, e.g., by 'London is beautiful', but that the thought or belief itself is non-linguistic. This is exactly the view taken by Patricia Churchland who, in an attack on what she calls the 'sentential paradigm', cites approvingly C.A. Hooker:

> Language will surely be seen as a surface abstraction of much richer, more generalized processes in the cortex, a convenient condensation fed to the tongue and hand for social purposes. (Churchland 1986: 396).

Spoken utterances consist of reasonably short sentences because we need time to breathe. But there is no reason to suppose that the lungs are so intimately implicated in *thinking*. That stretches of thinking can be chopped up into discrete, complete units, each *the having of a thought* is an extremely dubious empirical hypothesis. Again, an utterance possesses the grammar of a particular language. In times long past, people used to believe that the grammar of a particular language (e.g., Latin or French) was the grammar of thought. There is absolutely no empirical evidence for such a belief. What evidence there is suggests that the 'grammar of thinking' is rather meagre - that which is common to the differences between all first-generation creoles and their antecedent pidgins (Bickerton 1984). Thinking is not isomorphic with saying. Someone - Pierre - may *utter* a covert contradiction. This does not show that there has to be any contradiction in the underlying *thinking*, so we need not conclude that the speaker is irrational. We can legitimately *avoid* the question of whether Pierre does or does not believe London to be beautiful by distinguishing what he would *say*, if asked, from what he *thinks*. This means that we are committed to denying that assertions are always the undistorted expressions of our thinking.

Let's look a little more closely at the process of expressing a belief or a thought. I have been urging that a belief or thought is structurally dissimilar to a verbal utterance. So expressing a thought might be compared to expressing toothpaste from a tube. The form of the expressed toothpaste (short, thin and cylindrical) is simply a result of the manner of its production (extrusion, under intermittent pressure, through a round nozzle). Neither the geometry of toothpaste (!) nor the structure of thought can be inferred from what comes out of, respectively, our nozzles or our mouths. Yet, when we wish to <u>say</u> what we are thinking, there has to be a priming stage when our thinking is linguistically encoded so that it may be delivered to the outside world. The *coded* thinking shares the structure of the linguistic utterance, but I am suggesting that distortion may occur in the coding process just as it may occur in employing a code (which might include the conventions of perspective drawing) for producing two-dimensional pictorial representations of the three-dimensional world. (Especially if you are Maurits Escher.)

Thinking and thoughts

Confusion sets in immediately we equate thinking with the having of thoughts where these thoughts are conceived of as entities having a linguistic structure. The trouble is that there is a perfectly respectable notion of a thought, viz., a speech act from which the sound has been abstracted (just as, in (Austin 1975: 92-6), a so-called 'phonetic act' is a speech act from which everything *except* the sound has been abstracted), and this clearly is a linguistic creature. It is a serious mistake to assimilate thoughts in this latter sense with elements or constituents of thinking. When I ask for your thoughts on a subject, I am not expecting a neurophysiological report. However, when I'm assessing your rationality, it is your thinking I am interested in, and I may need to discount some of the linguistic clothing in which your thinking is dressed; we do this all the time with speech-impaired people.

Although Pierre makes what *we* recognize to be contradictory assertions, these are not expressions or representatives of an underlying contradiction in his thinking. His assertions that London (Londres) is beautiful were based upon what he heard from other monolingual French

people and upon his seeing some pictures, captioned 'Londres', of nice parts of the town. His assertions that London is not beautiful were based upon his perceiving different parts of the same town. There is nothing at all contradictory in these perceptions and it is only when they are 'fed to the tongue' that contradictory assertions emerge. Let us not forget that a dog, after it has perceived a neighbourhood for a short time, can soon find its way around, and acquires many beliefs about the environment. It can do the same when placed in a different neighbourhood. The dog would not be accused of irrationality or inconsistency if it failed to appreciate that these were two quite distinct neighbourhoods *in the same town*. And Pierre is in a position similar to the dog's, at least until he starts putting names to what he sees.

The public language English contains an expression to which convention has assigned the role of referring to the city of London. If we can successfully deny that there is an element of thinking that plays a counterpart role, then we can repel, as resting on a false assumption, questions about what Pierre thinks about the city. Remember, we are not asking about what Pierre *would say* about London: the question about Pierre should be compared to the question 'What does the dog think about London?', to which the answer is 'Nothing' - unless, perhaps, the dog is viewing the whole city from the basket of a hot air balloon. In the case of humans, there is undoubtedly a process by means of which our thinkings and perceivings get translated into words, as when we report what we think or perceive. But it is a mistake simply to *assume* that, conversely, to each of our words there is a mental counterpart, for example some distinctive cluster of neural spikes.

If we have made a reasonable case that predicates in natural languages have no counterparts in thinking, then it is highly plausible to suggest that singular terms don't either. The classical grammatical dichotomy of singular term/predicate rests upon the idea that there are two heterogeneous but complementary *logical* roles for words to perform: that of *identifying* individuals, and that of *characterizing* the individuals so identified. Kant, as is well known, saw this dichotomy manifested in the mental realm in the shape of a categorial distinction between *intuitions* and *concepts*, no judgment being possible without the presence of *both* (Kant 1781: A51/B75 (Kemp Smith (trans.) 1929)). By raising doubts about one element of this complementary pair we are bringing the whole doctrine into question and *ipso facto* casting doubt on the other element. (It is fascinating, in this regard, to compare the writings of the ancient Chinese philosophers of language who, for various reasons, were not drawn towards the dichotomy that, in western theorizing, now seems so natural: see Hansen (1989).)

Two mistakes

We have distinguished *asserting* from *thinking*, where the latter is taken to be a brain process. When we say, 'After a lot of thinking, he reached the conclusion that p', we are referring to this process. But we have seen that there is another sense of 'think' much more closely related to 'assert'. Thus, to say 'He thinks that p' means, roughly that he would be prepared to assert that p. It seems to me that these two senses of 'think' have often been conflated, with disastrous consequences. I cite as an example, Wittgenstein, who writes:

> One of the most dangerous of ideas for a philosopher is, oddly enough, that we think with our heads or in our heads. The idea of thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, gives him something occult. Is thinking a specific organic process of the mind, so to speak - as it were chewing and digesting in the mind? Can we replace it by an inorganic process that fulfills the same end, as it were use a prosthetic apparatus for thinking? How should we have to imagine a prosthetic organ of thought? No supposition seems to me more natural than that there is no process in the brain correlated with associating

> or with thinking; so that it would be impossible to read off thought-processes from brain-processes.....' (Wittgenstein 1967: ##605-608).

We may agree with Wittgenstein that we cannot read *thoughts* off from brain processes - say, because thoughts, like the contents of assertions, are in part *constituted* by context (see McGinn (1989), Recanati(1989), McDonough(1989)) - but still maintain that *thinking* is a brain process. It is only because he is guilty of the above mentioned conflation that Wittgenstein can make the mad claim that there is no process in the brain correlated with thinking.

The *opposite* mistake to Wittgenstein's, but one stemming from the same source, is made by many modern semanticists, particularly those who espouse the computational model of the brain. These writers accept that thinking is a brain process, and believe that it can in principle be described in computational terms. And, since they take *saying something with meaning* to be a form of thinking, they find it incumbent on themselves to give a computational account of semantics. Perhaps the best known exemplar is the linguist Jerry Fodor (see, e.g., his (1975, 1987)). Fodor is impressed by the fact that our belief and attitudes are *productive*. He explains this notion as follows:

> It has probably never occurred to you before that no grass grows on kangaroos. But, once your attention is drawn to the point, it's an idea that you are quite capable of entertaining, one which, in fact, you are probably inclined to endorse. A theory of the attitudes ought to account for this productivity; it ought to make clear what it is about beliefs and desires in virtue of which they constitute open-ended families. (Fodor 1985: 89).

Fodor believes that the productivity problem is solved by the idea that our thoughts have constituents that can be assembled in a variety of ways to produce completely new thoughts. These constituent symbols, he claims, are nothing other than mental representations - words in a 'language of thought' - upon which we perform computations (Fodor 1975).

Fodor's conclusion, then, is that RTM (the representational theory of mind) is a consequence of the requirement for unasserted mental sentences to be the constituents of complex propositional attitudes. His is a brain-writing thesis writ large: the words of a mental language are physically instantiated in the brain, and, just as groups of words of natural languages represent how things are in the world (e.g., when a speaker *says* how things are) so groups of words of the mental language constitute inner representational states. But the critical question to ask of Fodor is 'How do these representations represent?' I.e. how do these signs in the brain acquire their intentionality and other semantic properties? (Heil 1981). Zenon Pylyshyn answers this question by proposing that the semantical properties of representational states arise from the causal relationships which, *qua* physical entities, those states enjoy. He writes

> There is, if you like, a parallel between the behavioral patterns caused by the physical instantiation of the representational states and the patterns captured by referring to the semantic content of these states. How can this be? How can such a parallel be maintained coherently over time? Only one nonquestion-begging answer to this dilemma has ever been proposed: that what the brain is doing is exactly what computers do when they compute numerical functions; namely, their behavior is caused by the physically instantiated properties of classes of substates that correspond to symbolic codes. These codes reflect all the semantic distinctions necessary to make the behavior correspond to the regularities that are stateable in semantic terms. In other words, the codes or symbols are equivalence classes of physical properties which, on one hand, cause the behavior to unfold as it does, and on the other, are the bearers of semantic interpretations that provide the needed higher-level principles for their

> individuation and for stating the generalizations. As dyed-in-the-wool realists, we propose as the next step exactly what solid-state physicists do when they find that postulating certain unobservables provides a coherent account of a set of phenomena: we conclude that the codes are 'psychologically real', that the brain is the kind of system that processes such codes and that the codes do in fact have a semantic content. (Pylyshyn 1984: 39-40).

So, for example, the behaviour of removing my trousers may be the causal result of a number of inner states, states which under a *semantical* description are propositional attitudes such as the *belief* that I am currently wearing trousers, the *desire* to be divested of them, and, perhaps, some higher-order attitudes such as the belief that Brigitte desires to have me trouserless. Fodor has a closely similar response (consult his (1985: 91)). He argues that a computer operates on symbols which, under one description, have meaning, under another description have causal properties.

The easiest way to refute the Fodor\Pylyshyn claim is to find examples of ambiguous sentences, i.e. sentences tokens of which, while *physically* alike, mean different things in different contexts, where the difference cannot be attributed to lexical or syntactical ambiguity (so that the counterpart mental sentences would be identical). Consider first the aristocratic woman who boasts:

> 'I can get as much sexual satisfaction as I want just by snapping my fingers.'

This can be disambiguated only if one knows the cultural significance of snapping one's fingers (curtly summoning an inferior - in this case, a stud). Consider also

> 'The headmaster said that a pupil would be killed unless something is done about road safety provisions near the school.'

The ambiguity of this can be discerned by comparing it with 'The terrorist said that a passenger would be killed unless....', i.e. the headmaster's statement could be read as a *threat*, but it isn't - it would normally be read as a *prediction*. So, to understand these two statements, we need to know about the institutions of threatening and predicting, and we need to know something about the different roles played by terrorists and headmasters. It seems clear that we are now well outside the territorial waters of (deep) syntax and the causal roles that sentences *qua* physical entities can play.

Thus we have to reject a computationalist account of semantics, the fundamental reason being that computationalism is an *internalist* doctrine since the relevant computations are upon states of the brain. Yet two speakers can have identical internal states, and be making the same utterance, yet what they *mean* be entirely different - the classical argument is to be found in (Putnam 1975) and is developed in (McGinn 1989).

We can reinforce this point by reverting to what is correct about Wittgenstein's position. For Wittgenstein, the *semantics* of an utterance is its use in a context (Wittgenstein 1953: #525) where a context is "not the mere physical environment of the utterance, but is the institutional and cultural background of the utterance. A context, so conceived, is 'significant' in the sense that it is constituted by *rules, procedures, norms and the like*" (McDonough 1989: 7, cf. Wittgenstein 1953: #337). Normative constraints for the use of words "arise because that use is shaped or gradually mastered within an experience of normative or conventional practices which enable communication and mutual understanding" (Gillett 1988). The use of a word, says McDonough, is embedded in its situation:

> "The key notion in Wittgenstein's notion of use is that of *context embeddedness*...This embeddedness is not constituted by causal connections

> between utterances and contexts, but by criterial or conventional connections between them. The description of the use of an utterance is, therefore, nothing like the description of a physical state. It is more like the description of a *criterial connection* between words and significant contexts." (McDonough 1989).

These sketches of Wittgenstein's position are not transparently clear, but I am not yet able to offer any significant improvement. Nor have I done anything to figure out the relationships between the Wittgensteinian and the Putnam\McGinn accounts of how context enters into the content of an utterance. All this work remains on the agenda.

Conclusion

Semantics is not the study of the concept of *meaning*. This concept may well be obscure or incoherent, as many of the authors we mentioned at the beginning aver. But that does not imply that the *phenomenon* of *meaning what we say* is chimerical. I have argued that, although *meaning what we say* is not a *biological* phenomenon - one that can be explained entirely in neurobiological terms - the role of the brain cannot profitably be ignored. But the connection between *thinking* and *saying* is by no means simple; in particular, I argued, the two are not isomorphic. And this is primarily because the content of one's sayings is essentially context-involving. What is required, then, is a neuroscientific account of how the brain processes sensory and other input when such input calls forth a verbal response, a psycholinguistic account of the relation of *thinking* to *speaking*, and a philosophical/linguistic account of the relation of context to the content of an utterance. In short, this is a project for cognitive science.

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SEMANTICS AND ITS CRITICS

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East and West, philosophers have an inordinate fondness for espousing theses which are baffling to common sense. (Parmenides' claim that nothing changes and Kung-sun Lung's famous denial that a white horse is a horse are examples that spring to mind.) They also have a penchant for using key words in ways opaque to non-philosophers. When both these traits are combined, it does not make for clarity of communication. This is the difficulty I have with Dr. Goldstein's paper 'A Programme for Semantics', and in particular with his use of the term *semantics*.

Now I would be the first to admit that the term *semantics* does get used in some astonishing ways nowadays. Very recently I was reading a paper which purported to inform me (quite seriously, as far as I can judge) that scientists now know that the operations 'critical to semantics' take place in 'cortical areas underneath your forehead'. Furthermore, it appears, I might even be able to observe them taking place (and in technicolour) thanks to the newly developed technology of positron emission tomography.

'Watch yourself doing semantics: it's on the screen *now*!'

But is it? I doubt it. And I doubt that it ever will be, however refined the techniques of PET become. The patches of colour on the screen tell me no more about semantics than a comprehensive brain-scan of Boris Becker could tell me about tennis.

Perhaps I should add that this article on PET began with a quotation from T.S. Eliot, in which J. Alfred Prufrock complains that it is impossible *to say just what he means*, and fantasizes that it might somehow be possible to make visible his desperate cerebral search for the right words, 'as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen'. Precisely thus, the article claimed, PET technology could now reveal 'the mind in motion'. It blew the trumpet of 'cognitive science' loud and long. I probably would not have remembered reading it but for the arrival on my desk of Dr Goldstein's paper, which is far more serious stuff.

I find myself listed in the opening paragraph among those who in recent years have promoted or taken part in a savage assault on the 'worthy enterprise' of semantics. To this savagery, it appears, I have devoted at least two books, or parts thereof, over a period spanning most of the past decade. Clearly I am a bad guy, because only bad guys savagely assault worthy enterprises. And those who return to their savagery unsatiated over a period of years must presumably count among the most sadistic butchers.

Given the charge, it would be a feeble defence simply to say that I think Goldstein has got it all wrong. So I will try to muster some evidence which at least suggests that he may have done so. Although he mentions two books of mine, he does not refer to the first book in that trilogy, *The Language-Makers*, which was published in 1980, one year earlier than *The Language Myth*. Now a reviewer in the *Canadian Philosophical Review* told the readers of that learned journal that *The Language-Makers* was 'a defense of structural semantics'. So unless anyone contends that I had completely changed my position between 1980 and 1981, it seems that there is something odd here. No one who has reviewed all three volumes of the trilogy has (so far) accused me of shifting

my ground in the course of it. I would be surprised if such an accusation would even occur to any intelligent reader, and even more surprised, I need hardly add, if the accusation could be substantiated.

Let me make it quite clear that I am not here endorsing the particular interpretation of *The Language-Makers* given in the *Canadian Philosophical Review*; but at least the writer in that journal showed an awareness of something which Goldstein's article ignores entirely; namely, that there are a number of quite distinct forms of academic inquiry which have, at various times and places, been called *semantics*.

The English term *semantics* is a translation of the French *sémantique*, coined in the late nineteenth century by Michel Bréal. It was originally applied to the study of changes of meaning (e.g. of the kind documented in the columns of the *Oxford English Dictionary*) and is still used in this sense. Somewhat later it came to be used to designate a branch of synchronic linguistics within the structuralist framework inaugurated by Saussure. Third, it was adopted as the designation of one of the three subdivisions of semiotic, as developed by Rudolph Carnap and his followers. Fourth, it was taken over as a general rubric in academic philosophy under which to place a certain range of traditional problems related to the notion of truth (but which had never before been called problems of 'semantics'). Fifth, it was appropriated by experimental psychologists, under whose aegis it became a cover term for the investigation of word associations and language-related aspects of memory. But in none of these various and quite separate enterprises was semantics ever what Goldstein's (presumably naive) reader is invited to believe, i.e. the investigation of the ability of people (other than J. Alfred Prufrock) to 'say things and mean what they say'. *A fortiori,* his description of my work and that of others listed in his opening paragraph as attacks upon this 'worthy' (but non-existent) endeavour is a misdescription.

Nor did scepticism about meaning 'really erupt' with Quine in the early 1950s, as Goldstein says it did. It had already been erupting periodically for a least a generation before that. The Mount Vesuvius of them all occurred when Quine was still a student. This was the behaviourist cataclysm of the 1920s, which had a more devastating effect both inside and outside the walls of philosophy than all the publications of Quine put together.

Scepticism about meaning was in any case a much more pervasive cultural malaise, by no means confined to any of the academic branches of semantics mentioned above. The 'literary' manifestation of this scepticism is represented by such figures as Andre Breton and James Joyce. (Did anyone mention T.S. Eliot?) Its popular brand was marketed by Orwell. And scepticism about translation (Quine's second great contribution, according to Goldstein's potted history of semantics) has a longer history still, dating back to Classical antiquity.

Even if Goldstein's historical framework were not askew from the start, the gems of misinformation framed therein would glitter in their own right. The reader is told that both Bloomfield and Chomsky 'advocated a semantics-free linguistics' (an assertion that immediately leads one to wonder whether its author can ever have read carefully the works of either). The theoretical positions taken by Bloomfield and Chomsky on this are quite different. Chomsky began his career arguing for the *independence* of grammar from linguistic meaning (which is by no means the same as advocating 'a semantics-free linguistics'), but his later work is very much concerned with issues in (one branch of) semantics. As for Bloomfield, on the other hand, his linguistics, far from being 'semantics free', was actually semantically based. Bloomfield's mature work in linguistics included devising a whole new terminology for semantics. No wonder Goldstein, having ignored all this, feels free to proclaim himself the champion of a 'new programme' in semantics.

Any programme, however, deserves to be judged on its own merits, and not just by the rhetorical claims of its promoter. Inspection of the programme, unfortunately, merely deepens my perplexity about what Goldstein's 'semantics' is supposed to be. The new programme is ushered in with a second-hand conundrum borrowed from Kripke. Even first-hand, the conundrum in question was never very puzzling. We are spun an unconvincing philosopher's yarn about a dimwitted Frenchman, Pierre, who hasn't worked out that the same city is known as *London* in English but as *Londres* in French. Zo ee mekk ze beeg goof of assigning incompatible predications to these two cities 'London' and 'Londres'. One he finds pretty and the other not (and this on the basis of what he himself has seen). Poor Pierre. Nil out of ten, if not *zéro*. And from Pierre's low score in the predication test, we are invited to conjure up a beeg problem for semantics to solve.

The sheer farce of this example is that there is no problem at all. Pierre is not guilty of any contradiction, dim though he be. Goldstein cites me as claiming that one 'cannot generate a contradiction out of nothing more than ignorance of an identity' and quotes an amalgam of Aristotle and Shakespeare against me. Obviously, this must be another instance of my predilection for savaging semantics.

Now satisfying though it would be to outshine the combined forces of The Philosopher and the Swan of Avon in one glorious joust, I fear that neither of these two worthies would be prepared to enter Goldstein's lists against me on this issue. For neither independently makes any claim which would lay a contradiction at poor Pierre's door. Goldstein tries to make out that both Aristotle and Shakespeare subscribe jointly to some such declaration as: 'It is impossible for the same property at the same time to belong and not to belong to the same object, by whatever name that object is known.' That is stretching the evidence, to say the least. As far as I know, Aristotle never discusses substitution of synonyms as a logical problem, while Shakespeare never discusses the Principle of Contradiction. So the team against me is one that only manager Goldstein has fictitiously cobbled together.

The plain common sense of the matter is that it quite obviously *does* make a difference whether Pierre knows that *London* and *Londres* designate the same city or not. And he might indeed be guilty of a contradiction if he said, for instance, 'Londres est jolie, mais London n'est pas jolie; et c'est curieux, parce que c'est la même ville'. (Or he might just be joking.)

The odd thing to me about Goldstein's position (unless he is joking too) is that one of today's philosophical idols - Frege, no less, who was, according to Dummett, 'the founder of modern semantic theory' - pointed out a long time ago that if A and B both use the name *London* but each attaches different items of knowledge to this name then they are - from a logical point of view - speaking different languages. (So if both utter 'the same' sentence of the form 'London is *p*' they do not necessarily agree with each other, while if A utters it and B does not concur they are not necessarily contradicting each other.) I would have thought that the moral of this lesson in the case of Pierre hardly needs spelling out. Yet, bizarrely, Goldstein wants to accuse Pierre of falling into contradiction *only* when his perceptions of different parts of what is in fact (unknown to him) the same city are 'fed to the tongue', i.e. put into words. On the contrary, *pace* Goldstein, that is just what Pierre in his innocence avoids, because when he verbalizes his impressions he uses the word *Londres* to designate the city he finds pretty and the word *London* to designate the city he does not find pretty.

Pierre, bless him, *does* mean what he says. And that, ironically, is just the bit Goldstein's 'semantics' cannot cope with.

It is not my purpose to criticize the rest of Goldstein's paper in detail, but here are two general comments. (1) Much of Goldstein's case seems to rest on an elementary semantic confusion of sense with reference (a suspicion reinforced by his invoking briefly in support an argument of Putnam's which is notorious for this very confusion). (2) The paper seems to be infected throughout with a misguided zeal to reject common sense and bemuse us with alleged riddles in 'semantics'. For instance, Goldstein at one point tries to show that it is impossible to have two different concepts of prettiness (or of anything else, for that matter). And this in turn supposedly goes to show that, in spite of naive impressions to the contrary, the lay belief that we think with words is totally mistaken. A great triumph for the new programme! When 'semantics' gets to that stage of Byzantine obscurity, perhaps it is best patted on the head and left to bemuse itself.

The only positive contribution I can offer to Goldstein's new programme is to try to pinpoint exactly where it goes off the rails. The point is at that tricky junction where a switch is made from talking about language to talking about 'thinking'. Goldstein appears to regard thought as a kind of mental toothpaste in a tube, which is just goo until squeezed out linearly into words. I do not wish to get involved here in yet another argument about the linearity of the linguistic sign (having already made in print my fair contribution to that perennial debate). But if you want to claim that thinking is something quite independent of and prior to verbalization, as Goldstein's 'toothpaste' analogy seems to imply, then you cannot at the same time claim it has anything to do with semantics, which - at least, on all accounts I know of- is by definition concerned with language. So 'toothpaste' semantics is not merely an amorphous but an incoherent enterprise. *There is no toothpaste in the tube.*

Apart from the metaphor, perhaps, this is hardly news. The point has been argued by many theorists who have written about language, including Saussure and Wittgenstein, and Goldstein gives us no reason (apart from all the nonsense about Pierre) for concluding that they were wrong. But if all Goldstein means by his toothpaste metaphor is that different languages are semantically anisomorphic in various respects, that is hardly news either. (In the semantics business, it was announced decades back in a more interestingly controversial form usually associated with the names of Sapir and Whorf.)

When I reason that if all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal, it is quite implausible to suppose that I first of all go through some entirely non-verbal 'thinking' process, and then search around for a linear sequence of appropriate words in which my 'thinking' may. if need arise, be announced to the outside world. Or if I do, then I can tell you nothing about it, and nor can anyone else. Nor would PET pictures of my cerebral processes during the timespan in question throw any light on the matter. There is no reason for supposing that I engage in any such mysterious process at all. For the notion that my mind can somehow 'entertain' these particular propositions in a totally abstract form devoid of all verbal trappings just does not make much sense. Any question about the 'semantics' of my reasoning only arises once there are words to consider. And the words I use are not patches of colour on a PET screen.

This is not to say that I am in any way committed to the view that *all* kinds of thinking are verbal. Max Müller's famous dictum 'No thoughts without words' (which presumably for Goldstein epitomizes most of the fallacies he sees himself as attacking) certainly does not apply to all forms of communication (and I am not sure that Müller intended it to). For example, it seems to me that a painter often thinks with lines, shapes and colours, and not with words. But in the case of the painter, it also seems to me quite gratuitous to suppose that before the painting is started there occurs an abstract 'thinking' process in the painter's head in which lines, shapes and colours do not feature at all.

Finally, where language is concerned, I am aware that in certain areas of so-called 'cognitive science' the assumption is nowadays made that we would not be able to speak at all unless we had previously 'internalized', at a level far below that of consciousness (but doubtless in principle accessible to PET pundits in the Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology) the unimaginably complex rules of a language. Whether a similar claim is made about painting I do not know. As far as the linguistic claim is concerned, I have discussed it elsewhere ('The Grammar in Your Head', in *Mindwaves*, ed. C. Blakemore & S. Greenfield, Oxford, 1987) and do not wish to regurgitate that discussion here. The only point I would like to add is that 'cognitive scientists' who can swallow that kind of story about *speaking* doubtless can also swallow a parallel story about 'thinking' to go along with it. If they do, then I have a simple terminological recommendation to make: that 'cognitive science' should now be rebaptized 'cognitive mythology'.

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SEMANTIC SHAMANTICS

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Many readers of this journal will, by now, have become accustomed to Professor Harris' polemical outbursts, in seminars, on the radio and in print. By these standards, his 'Semantics and its Critics' seems quite bland. But this innocuous appearance is deceptive. Committing numerous errors and calling up unscrupulous rhetorical ploys as he proceeds, Harris has set out to beguile his readers and to befog the issues. My reply is an attempt to clear the air.

Harris' paper combines erudition, philosophical sophistication and wit in equal (if small) measure. The main ingredient, as I have suggested, is fog. This being so, all I can really do is to wander around in the murky prose and, when I can identify them, respond to his various points. (I use the word 'point' in the Euclidean sense - something having no breadth or depth, where two or more lines get crossed.)

The Fear of Science

I suspect that, like Wittgenstein, Harris sees science as wreaking destruction on the cultural landscape as it remorselessly advances into every area of enquiry. He has a visceral distaste for science, a fear of the unknown. Like his ex-Oxford colleagues, Peter Hacker and Gordon Baker, he wishes to insist that science certainly has no place in semantics. In their vastly entertaining book, *Language, Sense and Nonsense*, Hacker and Baker argue that the theories of meaning proposed by modern linguists and philosophers in the spirit of a science of language are responses to bogus problems. Now, I have a great deal of sympathy with this view, but here is what I take to be a non-bogus problem: Human beings have semantic ability - they can say things and mean what they say. A parrot, although it can utter words, does not have this ability. What exactly is it that we have, but parrots lack?

Is there nothing to be explained here? If there is something to be explained, is it at all likely that neuroscientific findings about the differences between human and parrot brains will be *completely irrelevant* to the explanation? If not, then science does have something to do with semantics in so far as it has some contribution to make to the understanding of semantic competence. There are a number of things that Harris could say at this stage. Far be it from me to guess what *precisely* he would say, but he would undoubtedly charge that I have been using the word 'semantics' in a non-standard way. More on that in a short while.

In W. Calvin and W.J. Ojemann's (1980), you can read about a man who had a minor stroke that left him with a remarkable speech defect. All his utterances were as grammatically correct as those of a normal person, except that, whenever he should have used a noun, he always inserted the phrase 'affirmative action'. There is now a great deal of evidence about the relation of different brain lesions to different kinds of speech defect. For example, it is a fact that lesion in the angular gyrus typically leads to impairment of naming ability. Discoveries such as these excite my interest. It seems obvious that such neurophysiological research will throw much light on human linguistic skills. Professor Harris is merely scornful about the possible relevance of such work. His remarks on positron emission tomography give you the flavour.

Facile Solutions

Kripke's puzzle about Pierre has been troubling philosophers and others for over ten years; a collection of essays on it and related problems has recently been published in the *Oxford Studies* series. Naturally enough, Harris thinks that the conundrum is just an 'unconvincing philosopher's yarn', and that he can solve it at the stroke of a pen. Unfortunately his solution (which, as he acknowledges, is taken from Frege) just won't work. One cannot expect a busy man like Professor Harris to keep up with the literature outside his own subject, so I don't really want to criticize him for being unaware of the powerful body of arguments assembled over the last twenty years which have shown that the 'description theory' of proper names, on which he relies, is untenable. (I could give him a reading list, at the top of which would be the introduction to the second edition of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.) Nor would I expect him to know that his proposed solution is considered and rejected in the original article in which the puzzle about Pierre is propounded.

What I can criticize Harris for is a failure to observe the ludicrous consequences that his application of the discredited Fregean theory lands him in. For Harris is led to the conclusion that Pierre "uses the word 'Londres' to designate the city he finds pretty and the word 'London' to designate the city he does not find pretty". Well, are these cities the same? If they *are*, then my affirmation that Pierre falls into contradiction resists Harris' denial. If they are *not* then where *are* these two cities that Harris' sorry tale leads him to postulate? They are certainly not co-inhabitants of the earth's surface, like London, England and London, Ontario. So perhaps they just exist in Pierre's mind. So that when Pierre says to his French friends 'Je vais à Londres' they don't wish him a pleasant trip, since he's only going on a flight into his own imagination.

Kripke has some good advice in his original article: when people like Harris purport to solve the puzzle by describing Pierre's situation in various ways, press upon them the question 'Does Pierre, or does he not believe London to be pretty?'. That's a good, straight question that *I* should like to pose to Harris. I'm not asking whether Pierre finds pretty the parts of London that *I* know or the picture of London that *I* have in my imagination. I don't think that Harris' solution makes available to him a straight answer to this question.

Harris magnanimously offers to identify the exact point at which my programme 'goes off the rails'. It is, apparently, where a switch is made from talking about language to talking about thinking. In my paper, I compared the expression in words of what someone is thinking to the squeezing of toothpaste from a tube. The point of the analogy, of course, was to illustrate my claim that the shape, or structure of a spoken or written language is quite unlike the structure of the underlying thinking. Now the cheapest thing that you can do to an opponent's analogy is to press it in a direction that you know full well your opponent did not intend it to be pressed. And sure enough, Harris adopts this ploy, and tries to foist upon me the claim that thought is just completely unstructured goo and is quite unrelated to language. I, of course, make no such claim.

I do, however, hold that thinking is non-verbal (which is not to deny that the development of one's thinking is influenced by the development of one's language). Professor Harris takes a contrary view; he holds that some kinds of thinking, for example, *reasoning* are verbal. Judging by remarks he makes towards the end of his paper, I gather that he thinks that, with the 'goo' theory sidelined, an account of (many sorts of) thinking as verbal is the only game in town. Well, he may have thought that when he was writing his paper, but since then he has attended a literature review seminar of mine on Colin McGinn's *Mental Content*, and will now know that the theory of *mental models* (where the models are simulations, not representations) is a serious contender. The locus classicus for that theory is Kenneth Craik's (1943), and a better known recent work is Philip Johnson-Laird's (1983). I do not have the space here to mount a full-scale exposition and defence of the theory of mental models, but I can just briefly mention three respects in which it scores over the sentential view. First, it allows room for crediting language-less creatures with thinking;

second, it squares better with experimental results obtained by psychologists on reasoning-speed (see Johnson-Laird, *op. cit.)*; third, it makes more sense biologically (see McGinn, *op. cit.*, Patricia Churchland, *Neurophilosophy*, Ruth Millikan (1984)). All of the works mentioned in this paragraph are tough going, and, of course, it's much easier to ridicule them than to read them.

Sophistry

Harris seeks to answer my charge that he is among the writers who have lately mounted an assault on semantics (I said that he 'not so much claimed that semantics is impossible, but that its pretensions to being a *scientific* study must be exposed'). You might think that, with so many best-sellers under his belt, it would be extremely easy for him to refute me simply by quoting one or two short passages. But no. Take a look at the convoluted procedure he adopts: First he quotes a reviewer of *The Language-Makers* (the first book in a Harris trinity) as saying that that book was 'a defense of structural semantics'. Then he indicates (he wouldn't, of course, just say it) that in the subsequent two books he did not shift his ground. We are being encouraged, it seems, to infer that Professor Harris is a steadfast defender of structural semantics. Wrong! For the next thing that Harris says is 'Let me make it quite clear that I am not here endorsing the [reviewer's] particular interpretation of *The Language-Makers*'. So what is the upshot? Does Harris favour structural semantics or doesn't he? Has he denied my characterization of his attitude to semantics, or hasn't he? We just can't tell. There seems to be nothing solid to grasp behind the veil of bluster and sophistry.

While we're on the subject of sophistry, let me expose another couple of examples from Harris' paper. At one point in my paper, I amalgamated a thesis of Aristotle's with one of Shakespeare's to produce a proposition with which one of Harris' claims was inconsistent. If the amalgam proposition is true, then Harris' is false, simple as that. It is, of course, open to Harris to show either that the Aristotelian or the Shakespearean thesis is false, or that truth was somehow a victim of the amalgamation process. But all of these three moves are intellectually respectable, so one would not expect Harris to avail himself of them. What he does instead is to insist, totally irrelevantly, that neither Aristotle nor Shakespeare *separately* maintained the amalgam proposition. Similarly: '2 + 3 = 5. Therefore 5 is not greater than 4, because neither 2 nor 3 is *separately* greater than 4.' Great argument. 'Surely Professor Harris' mistake can't be as crass as that', you say. Take another look at his paper, and let me know.

A second example. In the process of constructing a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, I tried to show that Pierre, when looking at pictures of nice parts of a town, might say that the town was pretty (jolie) but, when stuck in a shabby part of town, and not knowing it to be the same town as the one in the pictures, might say that the town was not pretty. He would be using the word 'pretty' in the same sense on both occasions. Somehow Harris conjures out of these remarks of mine the view that 'it is impossible to have two different concepts of prettiness (or of anything else for that matter)'. Huh? - or, as a chess columnist would put it, '??'. I should actually put it more strongly than '??', which means only 'highly questionable' - there is no question but that I never said anything remotely like what Harris says I said.

In the same paragraph, he says that I confuse *sense* and *reference* and hints that I've fallen under the bad influence of Putnam who is 'notorious' for being guilty of this confusion. Now, the distinction between sense and reference, which was made by Frege in 1892, is familiar to just about every philosopher. The word 'water', for example, refers to water; the *sense* of the word contains what Frege calls a 'mode of presentation' and can be expressed in a descriptive phrase which nowadays would include the term 'H2O'. This example, I hope, clearly illustrates the distinction. It is, by the way, the very example that Hilary Putnam uses in the very argument to which Harris alludes.

Scepticism about Meaning

Many forms of academic enquiry go under the title 'semantics', and Professor Harris supplies a somewhat incomplete list of these. In general terms all these enquiries are concerned, in one way or another, with *meaning*. Because, like Harris, I prefer homely, commonsensical locutions to dry, scholarly ones, I opted to characterize semantics as having to do with people meaning what they say, thus avoiding the rather pompous expression 'an investigation into the nature of meaning'. The paraphrase, though by no means perfect, was, I thought, innocuous enough, and had the virtue of picking out a *phenomenon* with which we are all familiar, rather than a *concept* that has proved worrisome to some. I don't know why Harris objects to my paraphrase, or thinks that I have twisted the meaning of 'semantics'. Perhaps he thinks that 'to mean what one says' has more to do with *threatening* than with *meaning*. If any readers share Harris' worries, let me reassure them that, like anyone else who writes on semantics, I am talking about *meaning*.

As to when scepticism about meaning really erupted, this question may not be one that keeps readers of this journal awake at night, so I'll be brief. In the early 1950s, a group of philosophers including W.V. Quine, Benson Mates and Nelson Goodman were arguing for the quite specific thesis that the concept of *meaning* is incoherent. If that thesis is correct, the consequences are far-reaching. The belief that there is a sharp division between analytic statements (those true or false in virtue of meaning alone) and synthetic ones would be exposed as mere dogma, and the idea that certain statements (including the laws of logic) do not have to face the tribunal of experience, and are immune to revision, would have to be jettisoned. At least, so Quine argued.

Harris urges that a more devastating sceptical eruption occurred thirty years earlier with the advent of Behaviourism. Although I am ready to acknowledge that the history of ideas is not my forte, it seems to me that a couple of points tell strongly against Harris' suggestion. First, we find behavioural (or 'mechanistic') linguists such as Bloomfield offering behavioural *accounts* of meaning. That hardly betrays a scepticism about the concept of meaning - quite the opposite - it just evinces their belief in the inadequacy of competing analyses. Second, behaviourism, in its stark form, denies the existence of all mental states and processes. So meaning would be condemned only if it were deemed a mental state or process, or were implicated in such, and it would fall under a blanket criticism rather than being subject to a specific attack. A similar point can be made about translation. Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation really was epoch-making because the argument convinced many people that there is no such thing as the translation of one language or idiolect into another. That's very different from harbouring a suspicion that sometimes interpretation is impossible or is necessarily inexact - a scepticism that has been around ever since people tried figuring out what others were saying to them.

One last little nit to pick: My understanding of Chomsky's early position is that he held that, whereas the rules of syntax could be brought under the control of formal, mathematical techniques, meaning is by nature unformalizable and is therefore best excluded from a science of language. I therefore described him as advocating a 'semantics-free linguistics'. I don't think that this is misleading, but I have no particular objection to Harris' wetter formulation either.

A Premature Apology Retracted

In the last paragraph of an earlier draft of this paper, I had written: 'Finally, I should like to mention one matter over which I unreservedly acknowledge Professor Harris to be right and myself to be wrong.' I was referring to the description of Bloomfield's work that I had given in 'A Programme for Semantics'. In his reply, Harris had said 'As for Bloomfield ... his linguistics, far

from being semantics-free, was actually semantically based.' I checked Bloomfield's *Language* (1933), and indeed found my characterization to be inaccurate.

How could I have come by this misconception? A friend has now identified one likely source. The following account of Bloomfield's position appears in a work that I had rather casually perused a few months earlier:

> '...distributional analysis dispenses with meaning altogether, treating linguistic structure as purely syntactic in nature. This elimination of meaning (a policy in line with then fashionable behaviourist theories in psychology, and officially espoused by Bloomfield in the 1930's as the only 'scientific' basis for linguistics) left linguists with nothing synchronic to describe except sequential patterns of substitution and co-occurrence'.

And who is the author of this passage? None other than Professor Roy Harris himself. (See his *The Language Machine*, p.69). We have here Harris saying one thing in a recent book, but then saying exactly the opposite in his reply to me - apparently just for the sake of scoring a cheap debating point. I accede here to editorial pleas for restraint, and simply invite readers to draw their own conclusions about scholarly standards.

As I said, having now taken a close look at Bloomfield, I see that he does find a place for the theory of meaning in linguistics. What he says is that semantics is the most recalcitrant area of linguistics, the mastery of which will require a great deal of scientific enquiry. So, perhaps inadvertently, Harris, in his reply to me, manages to say something correct. I wish to congratulate him on the nine lines of his paper in which he describes the place of semantics in Bloomfield's linguistic theory. This may be only a small matter in the context of this symposium, but truth is important, and Professor Harris' clarification is most welcome. Amidst the suffocating obfuscation and cancerous falsification of his paper it gleams like a little ray of sunshine.

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READING ALOUD SPEED AS A FACTOR IN ORAL FLUENCY AND GENERAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY?

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Introduction

Tests of oral proficiency have developed a great deal since oral ability was rated purely on one's ability to control the linguistic elements of spoken communication - pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. The notion of communicative competence has resulted in oral tests embracing a number of factors other than these:

* quality/quantity of information conveyed
* fluency
* paralinguistic features

to name but a few.

This paper explores the relation between reading aloud speed and fluency, and even general language proficiency, as these are assessed in oral testing. There is a commonsense notion that "the more fluent you are, the faster you speak, and the more proficient you are at the language". (There are limitations to this view of course: extreme speed results in a breakdown in intelligibility. This is not an aspect, however, that the paper addresses.) This notion is supported by the fact that a number of oral examinations include "fluency" and "speed of delivery" as part of the criteria on which to assess subjects' oral proficiency in a language:

(i) **Jones** (1979), in discussing the FSI Oral Interview, quotes 6 categories under *fluency*, viz:

1. Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.
2. Speech is very slow and uneven except for short or routine sentences.
3. Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentences may be left uncompleted.
4. Speech is occasionally hesitant, with some unevenesses caused by rephrasing and groping for words.
5. Speech is effortless and smooth, but perceptibly non-native in speed and evenness.
6. Speech on all professional and general topics as effortless and smooth as a native speaker's.

(ii) **Carroll** (1980), in his Oral interaction assessment scale, makes the following references to *speed*:

Advanced Level: Copes with speech at normal speed, responds promptly, speaking neither too slowly nor hesitantly.

Intermediate Level: Will have breaks in comprehension in normal, rapid speech presentations and his own speech will be of less than native tempo for stretches.

Basic Level: Although not needing unnaturally slow enunciation, sometimes has to be addressed somewhat deliberately. Speaks with some unevenness of tempo.

(iii) **Shohamy** (1981), in the first 2 levels of the 5-level Hebrew Oral Proficiency Rating Grid, makes reference to *fluency*:

Level 1: So halting & fragmentary that conversation is impossible.

Level 2: Speech slow, exceedingly halting, strained & stumbling except for short or routine sentences and memorized expressions. Difficult to perceive continuity in utterances.

As can be seen from the three excerpts above, what exactly is understood by fluency and speed is not always clear. In general, speed would seem to be a subset of fluency; at times, however, the two terms seem to be close synonyms.

Other sources also take speed to be an important factor or even determinant of fluency. Munby (1978) in applying the Communicative Needs Processor to a foreign language participant, under Dimensions in the Target Level guide - where he is specifying the participant's target level of command in the language - lists "Speed of Communication" as a factor to be borne in mind along with size and complexity of utterance when designing a language program for a specific target group.

Pendergast (1985), with regard to the Oral Language Analyser and Feedback System, OLAF, cites fluency (as a function of time) as one of the criteria by which a subject's oral ability would be computer-graded. The computer actually rates the subject on how many tone groups are uttered in a minute.

To what extent, though, is it really justifiable to classify a student as a "Minimum Communicator" partly on the grounds that his speech is "slow or halting"? Fulcher (1987) proposes that such judgements may not be well founded. He shows that certain English language tests (he cites the English Language Testing Service scale as an example) define three factors that are somehow involved in fluency - 'repetition', 'hesitation' and 'stumbling' - as being in inverse proportion to a speaker's proficiency. This, he suggests, is not borne out by examining real data: even native speakers stumble, hesitate and repeat themselves. Fulcher's concerns with these aspects of speech, however, arise mainly from a discourse viewpoint (e.g. with the role they may play in turn-taking) especially in native-speaker speech. In L2 learners, on the other hand, (lack of) knowledge of the L2 grammatical system may indeed be related to such factors as 'stumbling', as Fulcher (p.290) ackowledges.

Data from test subjects would seem to be essential here. An ERIC search , however, produced no references for studies which had looked at subjects' actual speaking speeds.

Hinofotis *et al*'s (1981) research into their test of foreign Teaching Assistants' levels of proficiency in English (1981: 113-114) is one of the few studies to have relevant data. *Flow of Speech* they elaborate as "Flow of Speech: smoothness of expression, including rate and ease of speech." They comment that in their study of foreign Teaching Assistants' English Language Proficiency levels, adding Flow of Speech as a criterion to be assessed increased the predictability of the overall *Language Proficiency* rating for the testing instrument they were developing.

The present study: aims amd methods

Fluency embraces a number of different factors - speech flow, uncompleted sentences, hesitations etc. The present study examines one aspect of fluency - a student's actual rate of delivery; in this case, the speed at which he reads aloud a prescribed reading passage.

The reading aloud passage was selected as the testing typology for the current study for a number of reasons:

(i) As far as the present study is concerned, the testing variable is tightly controlled, which makes for greater ease of comparability across testees. It also controls for the variable where speakers are thinking/struggling to generate their own meanings and are therefore not as smooth and effortless as they might otherwise be. (See comments above on stumbling; Fulcher (1987)). For reading aloud, it is conceivable that differences in speed are more likely to arise from differences in e.g. proficiency rather than in the actual communication being attempted.

It is however recognized that reading aloud has - understandably - much lower face validity as a testing typology nowadays (apart from the "Hey, listen to this piece from the newspaper" scenario, people generally do not read aloud unless directed to by a teacher).

(ii) Reading aloud forms part of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination Oral Test (see below); there was therefore also an obvious practical advantage to using this test typology.

The aim of the study then was to see to what extent speed of delivery correlated with oral ability in a language. From impressions based on experience, a correlation in the region of .2 was anticipated since speed of delivery, while not being a direct linguistic skill, appeared to be a feature of proficient communicators.

Concerning its own examinations, the papers on the Form 5 HKCEE correlate with each other at between .7 and .8. The Form 7 Use of English examination, which has recently been extensively revised, now has inter-paper correlations of around .5 where previously they were more in the region of .3.

In the current study, then, a correlation of .5 will be viewed as moderately high, while a correlation of .7 or above will be seen as high.

The study was conducted on the oral test of the HKCEE Form 5 examination. This is the major public exam for most school candidates in Hong Kong, and is the equivalent of 'O' levels in the U.K.; it is taken at the end of Secondary Form 5, when most candidates are about 17 years old. The candidature - the whole group - is in the region of 130,000. The oral test itself lasts 5 minutes, is scored independently by 2 examiners, and is in 2 parts: the candidate first reads a short dialogue with one of the examiners and then a picture is used to stimulate a short "conversation" between the candidate and the 2 examiners. Each day the pair of examiners test about 30 candidates, each day's group of candidates being a random sample of the whole group. The whole group correlation between the oral exam and the objective paper in 1989 was .68.

The examiners are provided each day with 3 different dialogues and pictures to use with candidates. A candidate receives a mark from 1 to 7 (1 being the weakest and 7 the strongest candidates) for both the dialogue and the conversation, using the following marking scheme:

Assessment of the Dialogue

Both examiners should give individual global assessments of the reading, taking into account accuracy, pronunciation, phrasing, intonation, fluency, etc.

Assessment of the Conversation

Both examiners should give individual global assessments of the conversation based on how well the candidate can communicate his ideas.

The total mark is then arrived at by taking the mean of both examiners' marks. The attempt is made during moderating the dialogues to have all dialogues of approximately equal length, and as far as possible, of comparative difficulty. (See Appendix 1 for sample dialogue).

For this study, one examiner was asked to time - using a stopwatch - candidates' starting and finishing times for reading the dialogues. As the examiners' reading parts are quite short and of approximately the same length on each dialogue, for the purposes of this study the amount of time the examiner 'interfered' on the candidate's time was ignored.

The examiner who was actually timing the dialogues was informed of the purpose of the study; the second examiner was only informed that the readings were being timed, and not of the purpose of the study.

The study ran over 3 days and looked at 83 candidates.

Results

Candidates'results for the HKCEE are expressed in three ways:
* an overall subject mark/grade
* a profile grade for the Reading/Writing (R/W) papers of the exam
* a profile grade for the Listening/Speaking (L/S) papers of the exam

Each day's set of candidates can be taken to be a random sample. This is confirmed by the fact that the means and standard deviations (SDs) of the whole sample - as well as of each individual day's set of testees - are very comparable with those of the whole group for the test, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample and Whole Group Comparison (means and standard deviations)

	Whole Subj Mark (%)	R/W Skills Mark (%)	L/S Skills Mark (%)
Whole Group mean	50	50	53
Whole Group SD	19.4	18.8	20.6
Sample mean	52	51	56
Sample SD	15.7	15.7	17.8

A number of sets of correlations have been run. Analyses of the whole sample (n = 83) have been carried out as well as analyses for each of the 3 days' sets of testees.[1] Time taken to read the dialogue (TTRD) has been examined not only in terms of its correlations with scores on the oral part of the exam (Table 2), but also against the whole subject grade and the R/W profile grade (Table 3).

As can be seen from Table 2 (next page), the two examiners' marks correlate highly: the correlations for the reading aloud section, the conversation and the total oral score being .70, .74 and .77 respectively. These figures are in line with whole group figures; the inter-marker correlations in the 1989 oral exam ranged from .68 to .95, the whole group inter-marker correlation being .83.

The two examiners' individual correlations against time taken to read the dialogue (TTRD) and their scores on this section are quite high, being .66 and .68 for Examiners 1 and 2 respectively. This might to a certain extent be attributable to the fact that - if speed of delivery is an important factor - this is partly what examiners are awarding their marks to.

One notable feature is the fact that TTRD correlates with the marks on the conversation part of the oral test (both parts of the test are assessed individually and separately) almost as highly as TTRD correlates with the examiners' scores on the dialogue reading - at .59 and .60 for the two examiners.

Table 2: Correlations between Time Taken Reading Aloud (TTRD) and Oral Scores

	TTRD	Score: *Dialogue*	Score: *Conv*	Total Oral	Score: *Dialg*	Score: *Conv*
Score: *Dialogue*	.66					
Score: *Conv*	.59	.78				
Total Oral	.66	.94	.95			
Score: *Dialogue*	.68	.70	.71	.75		
Score: *Conv*	.60	.59	.74	.71	.81	
Total Oral	.67	.68	.77	.77	.95	.95

There is such a high correlation (.94 and .95) between the examiners' scores on the dialogue and conversation with their total oral scores as each are worth 50% of the total oral score.

Half of the total oral score is made up of the reading aloud score. As TTRD and the examiners' reading scores have already been seen to have correlated quite highly, it would seem reasonable to expect that TTRD would also have a correspondingly high correlation with the examiners' total scores. This is in fact the case as TTRD correlates with the total oral score at .66 and .67.

Table 3. Correlations between time taken reading aloud (TTRD) and proficiency test scores

	Ex.1 oral score	Ex.2 oral score	Whole Subj mark	R/W prof. mark	L/S prof. mark
TTRD	.66	.67	.59	.55	.60

As can be seen from Table 3, TTRD correlates with the Listening/Speaking profile at .60 and with the whole exam at .59; this may again be partly influenced by the fact that the score on the dialogue itself forms part of this score.

Discussion

The argument for speed of delivery being a factor in *oral fluency* is well supported by the fact that not only does TTRD correlate highly (.66 and .68) with the examiners' dialogue reading scores - in which TTRD itself can understandably be seen to be a direct factor - but that TTRD should correlate almost as highly (.59 and .60) with the examiners' scores on the conversation - in which TTRD is not a factor.

TTRD, however, has no bearing whatsoever on the Reading/Writing profile mark. It is somewhat surprising therefore that TTRD - by no means purely a linguistic skill - should also correlate so highly with the non-oral skills of reading and writing. The correlation here of .55 does indeed suggest that speed of delivery is related to, and is possibly even a factor in, *general language ability*. This is further supported by the correlation between TTRD and the whole subject mark: as the reading aloud section accounts for just 5% of the subject mark, the figure of .59 is therefore quite significant. This contrasts with the correlation, of around .2, which it had been anticipated the results of the study might produce.[2]

Speed of delivery (or a similar notion), then, stands in an important relationship to oral - and also to general - language ability, and is probably a factor in these abilities. The fact that a number of public exams include it as a facet of oral ability to be tested under *fluency* would seem to be justified. Test designers are justified in setting up criteria for fluency on the grounds that a subject who speaks slowly and haltingly will tend to be rated towards the weaker end of the spectrum.

Implications for teachers

As far as classroom practice is concerned, fluency in reading aloud may well be improved by focusing on a level of meaning above that of single words. If, when practising reading aloud, the teacher concentrates only on how well the students manage the citation forms of words, this may well perpetuate a slow and deliberate reading style. It may be more effective to get students to think about - and read in - sense groups such as the tone group. Being able to read in sense chunks will mean that students read with greater fluency - and probably with a slightly increased speed as well.

One area where reading aloud speed might be of direct use to teachers is as a diagnostic tool for assessing students' oral ability, for example when they enter a certain class at the start of a year.

NOTES

1 The day-by-day analyses are very much in line with the whole sample analysis, the range of correlations being a low of .48 (TTRD with Ex.2 score on Day 3 conversation) to a high of .76 (TTRD with Ex.1 score on Day 2 Dialogue Reading).

2 The level of significance for a two-tail test at the .01 level with 80 subjects is .283.

APPENDIX 1 : Sample Dialogue

(From 1989 HKCE Oral English Examination. Reproduced with permission).

(Read the candidate's words ONLY)

Examiner : What's that you've got?

Candidate : It's my new portable telephone. Just think! From now on I won't have to queue up whenever I need to make a phone call. I can just pull the machine out of my pocket and dial instantly.

Examiner : Was it expensive?

Candidate : I suppose it was really quite dear. Almost twenty thousand. Lots of my friends have criticised me. They say I'll never make that many calls. But they don't understand. It's so convenient. I can be available to my business customers twenty-four hours a day. And I can contact them, even if I'm on a yacht in the middle of the harbour.

Examiner : What do your friends think?

Candidate : They think it's wonderful. Whenever we're in a crowd and the telephone rings, they think that I'm like a film star. All my friends envy me. Particularly when the telephone rings in a restaurant and all the pretty girls look at me.

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NOTIONS OF 'ERROR' AND APPROPRIATE CORRECTIVE TREATMENT

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* * * * *

This paper discusses the relationship between the notion of 'error' in linguistics and language teaching theory and its potential application in terms of error correction in the classroom. It is the author's contention that existing theoretical distinctions between 'error' and 'mistake' are not being contextualized in appropriate corrective treatment in classroom practice, and that the adoption of finer distinctions in categorising errors could engender more suitable methods of correction. Presenting data elicited from the advanced learner classroom, the latter half of this paper demonstrates how error categories can be further refined for error correction purposes and argues for contextualized treatment of the suggested categories.

* * * * *

1. Introduction

The term 'error' is used in a variety of ways in linguistics and language teaching theory, in error analysis research, in English language teaching (ELT) including Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), and not least in the ordinary classroom. It is noticeable in particular that the term tends to be interpreted differently when applied to Native Speakers or to Non-Native Speakers of a language (for our purposes, of English). Although 'error' has been clearly defined in error analysis research and in ELT, interpretation and usage of this term specifically for error correction purposes has nevertheless been less than systematic.

The present paper proposes a system for categorising errors which is feasible and appropriate and specifically oriented towards the classroom correction of errors. The system derives from Hendrickson's (1981) proposals, with some modifications and additions developed on the basis of data gathered in the ESL classroom.

The next two sections clarify the notions of 'error' versus 'mistake' in linguistic and language teaching theory and in relation to interlanguage (IL) competence. This is followed by a description of categories of error designed specifically for error correction purposes.

2. Concepts of 'error'

2.1 'Error' in Psycholinguistics and in NS Speech

In terms of Native Speaker (NS) speech, the term 'error' as defined by Crystal (1980) refers more to what is known as a 'mistake', or 'a slip of the tongue' in spontaneous speech or writing, attributable to a malfunctioning of the brain. In the late 60's and early 70's, speech perception experts (e.g. Laver (1970), Boomer and Laver (1968)) defined 'slips of the tongue' as a reflection of temporary slips and went on to show that these can be plausibly explained as the interaction of elements occurring in speech simultaneously and temporarily. Laver (1970) even claims that spontaneous NS speech is far from 'error'-free and is full of hesitations, signals, pauses, vocalisations, and fillers such as 'ums', 'ahs', 'ers' (Goldman-Eisler 1968, Siegman and Pope 1965). These 'errors' reflect to a large degree language planning before speech and grammatical

encoding. The monitoring function, as revealed in the act of correcting a slip of the tongue, is in almost all cases automatic in NS speech and allows for the detection and correction of errors by the speaker himself (Laver 1970).

The distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' was made clear by Corder (1981) who characterises 'mistakes' in spontaneous speech or writing as being induced by slips of the tongue, or lapses in memory, arising from physical states and psychological conditions which have little to do with language competence but rather more to do with performance.

However, the term 'error' is commonly assumed to incorporate the notion of a 'mistake'. The use of 'error' as an umbrella term in the ESL classroom compounds the lack of distinction made in practice between 'errors' and 'mistakes', particularly for error correction purposes.

2.2 'Error' in English Language Teaching (ELT)

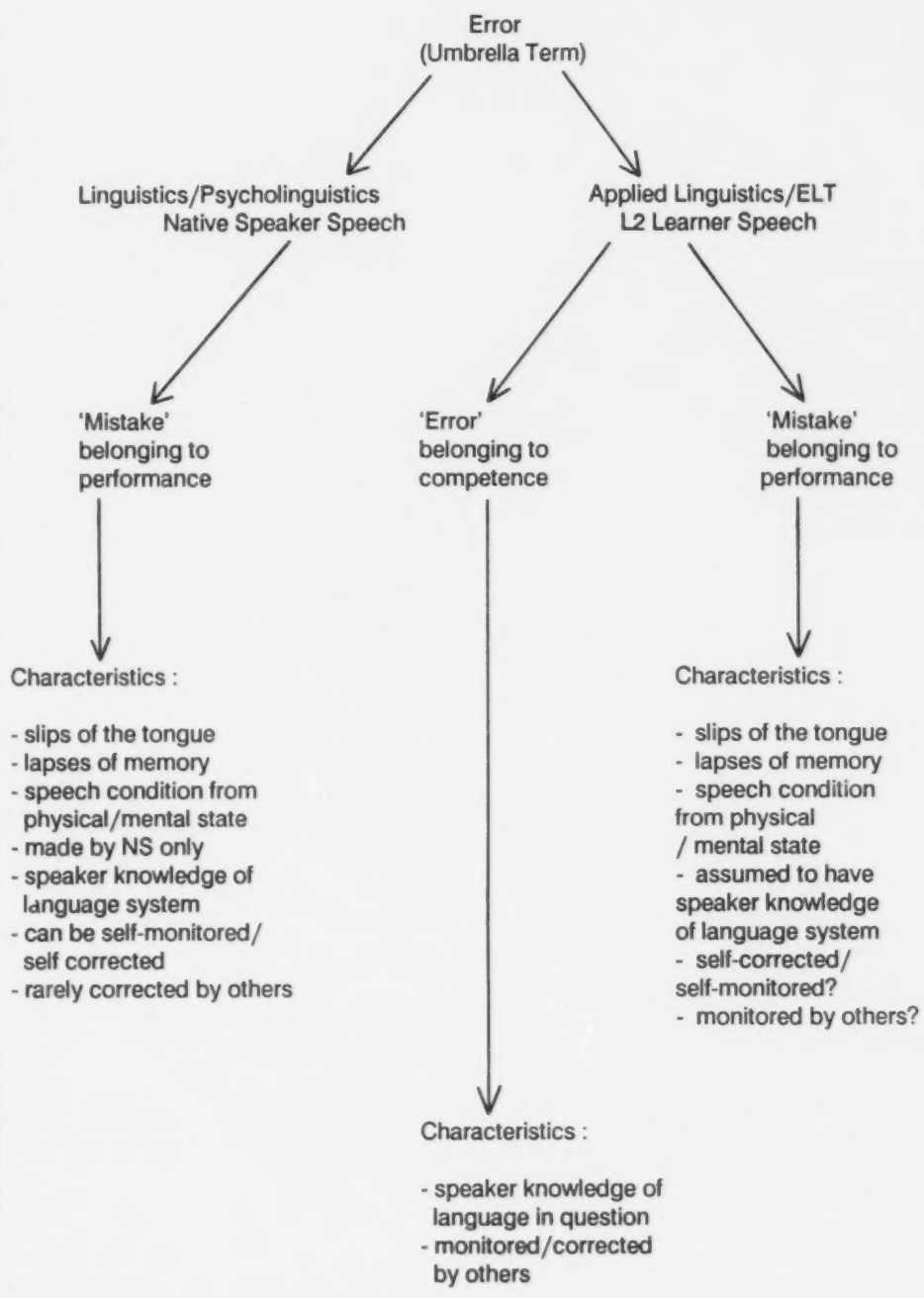
The notion of 'error' in ELT appears to differ markedly from that of 'error' in linguistics/psycholinguistics. In ELT, the term refers to the pedagogical notion of 'error' in the context of language learning and language teaching. In the early 70's, research into 'error' (e.g. by Corder 1967, Selinker 1972, Nemser 1971, Richards 1973, Dulay and Burt 1974) has demonstrated that learner errors are indicative of both the state of the learner's knowledge and of the ways in which the second language is being learned. 'Error' in ELT is a mark of a learner's transitional competence as distinct from 'mistake' or performance error (Corder 1967). Whilst 'error' would be characterized by any deviation from the norm in the language system relating to the L2 learner's competence, 'mistakes' are more closely connected in meaning to the NS term used in psycholinguistics to denote performance-related errors in spontaneous speech or writing (See Figure 1 for graphic represention of above discussion).

3. Interlanguage (IL) competence in relation to 'errors' and 'mistakes'

In terms of IL competence, 'error' in ELT denotes linguistic ignorance or confusion of the language system, and perhaps even fossilization of learner language in some instances. However, genuine fossilization is unlikely to occur in learning environments where further meaningful language input is available and further corrective treatment is given. More often than not, a learner would backslide along the IL continuum when there is declining input or decreasing corrective treatment or when affected by such factors as anxiety or dealing with a new topic matter. In these last cases in particular, one would expect that backsliding along the IL continuum would reflect the production of 'mistakes' rather than 'errors'.

It follows therefore that the 'permeability' factor in learner Interlanguage would need to play a key role in language improvement. Tarone's (1983) underlying assumptions of the IL continuum predict that during the acquisition process, Target Language structures would push to replace the vernacular. Therefore, learner language can only improve if the learner himself is 'permeable' to language input, in terms of both language form and functions, and arguably, to corrective treatment, without which learning/acquisition does not take place. This means that apart from having sufficient suitable input, IL competence may be pedagogically shifted towards the Target Language by the most appropriate form of corrective treatment or by the learner being made aware of language forms and functions which would enable him to monitor himself.

Figure 1 : Notions of error in linguistics / psycholinguistics and ELT



The term 'monitor' figures in the work of Krashen (e.g. 1976; 1981). Whereas Krashen himself sees the role of the monitor as being confined to conscious 'learning', a process which he sees as having no effect upon language 'acquisition', several other researchers have rejected his claims on these points: Dirven (1990) summarises recent discussion and references. Teaching experience also suggests that conscious attention to errors and mistakes could raise learner awareness of form and function and that this will eventually affect acquisition as well as performance.

Both corrective treatment of errors and fostering of self-monitoring of mistakes are methods that fall within the boundaries of the classroom and the teacher. In fact, Tarone (1983) has convincingly argued that at any given point on the interlanguage continuum, "...learner style shifts as a result of paying more attention to language form" (p.154). I would claim further that the monitoring function, whether by self, by peers or by the teacher would not only focus learner attention upon form and function but would encourage the learner to further monitor himself, thereby creating a learning spiral in which the learner, by the very nature of the task given, constantly verifies his language hypotheses against his 'errors' and/or 'mistakes'. I would further argue that, in a formal learning situation, this kind of 'monitoring' should not just be left to chance or individual initiative. It needs to be guided and appropriately conducted in the context of the classroom.

Commenting on existing error corrective procedures, Johnson (1988:91) states that "techniques (like, perhaps, explanation) for handling errors spring more readily to mind than techniques for handling mistakes", the underlying assumption for correcting only 'errors' being that we do not accept that L2 learners make 'mistakes' at all. But the distinction is there in theory, and recent literature (Bialystok 1982, Ellis 1985) on operating conditions in the classroom that affect the learning environment suggests that L2 learners do indeed make 'mistakes'. And if we accept that L2 learners will make 'mistakes' as well as 'errors', then corrective treatment in classroom practice needs to be accordingly adjusted to our changing concepts. The next part of this paper focuses on an analysis of how 'errors' in general may be broken down into different levels and categories, which may be adopted for error correction purposes in the classroom.

4. Categories of 'error' for error correction purposes

Errors may be categorised along a number of dimensions. Section 4 of the paper presents four complementary ways of classifying errors. Where appropriate, examples are taken from oral data recorded and transcribed from the classroom speech of advanced learners of English in Hong Kong. (Transcription conventions follow Sacks *et al.*, (1974)).

4.1 'Error' vs. 'mistake'

This section summarises the theoretical distinction between 'errors' and 'mistakes' which has been discussed above for error correction purposes in the classroom. For purposes of clarification, we begin by noting that 'errors' arise because the correct form or use of a target item is not part of a speaker or writer's competence, whereas mistakes arise (for reasons of fatigue, stress, inattention, etc.) even though the correct form or use is a part of the user's competence.

Some would argue that second language learners could not possibly make 'mistakes' until their L2 competence is at such an advanced level that they can be labelled "Near Native Speakers". It would seem that the argument may hold good for beginner learners but not for intermediate to advanced learners. It is very likely that intermediate to advanced L2 learners will tend to make

mistakes at the local level (Burt and Kiparsky's (1972) terminology) or at the morpho-syntactic level under new or difficult operating conditions at hand.

Such performance features can be classified as 'mistakes' because the learner's command of the correct form and use of an item (*i.e.* the place of these in the learner's present competence) are not in doubt. Indeed, a 'mistake' is most noticeable in the L2 learner in the simple act of self-correction, as evident in the monitoring function claimed by Morrison and Low (1983), as exemplified (from my own data) in the following utterance of an advanced learner:

S: If the statements of the killer **is are** all false, in the speech of Sei Jai Mihng - then two true - then there'll be two true and one false.

The making of this conceptual distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' is crucial in deciding on subsequent corrective treatment in the classroom.

4.2 Linguistic levels

By linguistic level, we can distinguish four major categories of 'errors' for classroom error correction.

4.2.1 *Grammatical (morpho-syntactic) errors*

The biggest distraction to-date for any language teacher with regard to comprehensive error corrective treatment has been the traditional focus in ELT on the treatment of errors at a grammatical level for both written and spoken language. The tendency has been for teachers to emphasize grammatical accuracy and to provide immediate corrective treatment. At the global level (Burt and Kiparsky's (1972) distinctions of global/local), morpho-syntactic 'errors' can detract from overall intelligibility and may thus have a serious effect on communication. At sentence level, what Burt and Kiparsky would call local 'errors' may often reflect performance 'mistakes' for which immediate teacher correction is not necessarily appropriate. Admittedly, morpho-syntactic errors are an extremely important category for teacher attention. However, there are other categories which deserve more of our attention than hitherto given.

4.2.2 *Discourse errors*

4.2.2.1 Mode of discourse. One of the most important dimensions to corrective treatment in the classroom has been suggested by Hendrickson (1981) who points out that pedagogy needs to be related to modes of linguistic presentation. The approach to correcting errors in the written mode should be quite different from the approach to correcting spoken errors. Each discourse mode demands different corrective treatment at different acceptable periods.

With written errors, teachers need not concern themselves so much with the question of **when** to correct as most corrections are accomplished after the written fact. Teachers could in fact save (or perhaps redeploy) a great deal of time and effort by developing a 'process' approach to writing, whereby students are taken through several drafts of their paper/composition. Each draft is submitted for marking, with the student holding a copy. The teacher (or, in some cases, other student marker) can then indicate by very simple notations (underlining, omission marks etc.) where corrections are needed. The student would then correct what he can, from his own knowledge. Such instances may be considered as 'mistakes'. True 'errors', that are resistant to

correction, can be more fully explained by the teacher. This approach would serve to raise the consciousness of the student with regard to form and function, and would also induce a sense of personal responsibility for 'mistake' correction.

With spoken discourse, the question of **when** to correct becomes vital to the learner's confidence and to the train of conversation. Not only do we have to be concerned with the **timing** of our correction but also the **acceptability** of the method for correcting oral errors of individual students. As a rule, it is extremely difficult for spontaneous conversation and interaction to take place in oral communicative discourse if the exchange is constantly being peppered with corrections from the teacher. As a result, immediate correction of oral errors cannot be encouraged for fear of damaging learner confidence. A more suitable approach would be to encourage learners to be sufficiently conscious of form to be able to monitor themselves and correct their own mistakes. Uncorrected errors which the teacher notes as persistent can be identified and explained by the teacher at a later stage. Inappropriate use of register (e.g. invariant use of full forms in informal speaking contexts) would be one instance here.

4.2.2.2 Rules of discourse. Recent investigations into communication strategies (Faerch and Kaspar 1983) have given rise to possibilities whereby IL errors may be caused by efforts to communicate thus offering the feasibility of error explanation in terms of performance, or discourse rules or rules of speaking.

Errors which indicate IL attempts to communicate reflect incomplete knowledge of the rules of speaking (Hymes 1972) or of address, which may or may not in itself induce grammatical errors. Strategies involving opening and closing moves during conversation, topic changes, and devices for taking the floor may result in the restructuring of conversation, paraphrasing, coining new words and code-switching. An exchange often brings a cross-cultural context to the attempt to communicate and a communication breakdown may be related to cultural interference beyond the morpho-syntactic level which cannot strictly be considered an error.

Consider the exchange below between 3 Cantonese-speaking students in a group problem solving communicative activity (Bank Robbery) in their L2 :

K: Er,so you have any cards mention about Sally's brother Sam Chan?

L: Sam Chan?

T: Yes=

L: =Sam Chan is the dynamite, is the one in charge of the dynamite

K: **Now you listen.** Er, Sally Chan states that her brother Sam was strolling to Hilton Hotel for coffee about 11 p.m. on Thursday November 11th, had seen Frank Man running from the bank.

The perlocutionary force of K's last utterance does not follow as expected, with instructions to other members of the group. K continued by offering information which helped clarify and solve the problem rather than to give instructions. The error reflects K's limited control over the pragmatic use of the language, a dimension that becomes crucial at an advanced stage of L2 learning.

Errors such as the following example by a Cantonese speaker in response to a WH-question in the negative form reveal ignorance of discourse rules in English rather than reflecting learner competence:

Q: You didn't come to class yesterday, did you?

A: Yes.

(As a rule, Native Speaker Cantonese always say 'yes' to negative questions in Cantonese).

The above examples reflect a style shift in the Interlanguage continuum which has been able to accommodate grammatical rules but as yet has to acquire a style that is culturally and pragmatically acceptable. If learners are to be fully competent in a variety of language styles, the possibilities of including correction of discourse errors in the classroom in the list of error categories for corrective treatment should be seriously considered for the future.

4.2.3 *Phonologically-induced errors*

As the term suggests, phonologically-induced errors pertain to errors in pronunciation and/or intonation. Correction of students' phonological errors at an advanced level and particularly with mature learners may risk affront to personal dignity and perhaps even to cultural and national identity. Few would expect students to be able to achieve a Native Speaker sound system in their second language and most L2 learners outside English speaking countries are content with achieving a plateau in their L2 pronunciation. This is an area where fossilization does tend to take place and extreme care needs be taken in a policy of discreet contextualized treatment. However, a communication breakdown can occur if a phonologically-induced error is serious enough to affect intelligibility. This is where **appropriate** corrective treatment is crucial in indicating the speaker's error, as by implicit suggestion from the listener. In some activities, such correction may still not require teacher intervention, as it may be forthcoming from other students.

The group oral discussion below exemplifies a case for correction of a phonologically-induced error which has created a serious communication breakdown when the error produced a change in intended meaning. In this instance, peer correction was implicit in the question that followed :

S: In my card, Mr. Man's father is mentioned

K: Mr. Frank Man's father

S: Father em but he is a (god) dealer in Bali. He had died in September.

P: What is what is...

S: A (god) dealer

P: (God)

S: (God) G.O.L.D. ((spelling it out)) (God)

P: Gold, gold

S: (Hai) ((Cantonese for 'yes')) Yes, gold =

P: =**Gold dealer**

S: Gold dealer

4.2.4 *Lexical errors*

Like morpho-syntactic errors, lexical errors are errors which are habitually corrected by teachers. On the whole it is easy for teachers to correct lexical errors as one only needs to pinpoint the change in meaning and provide the correct word. (While it would not be accurate to conflate 'lexis' and 'semantics', for practical error correction purposes most meaning choices do involve lexis).

However, lexical errors can easily arise in combination with other error categories. An example is from the above sample speaker's error from [gold] to [God], which can be seen as a lexical error that has been phonologically induced. Other examples might involve syntactic restrictions for certain lexical items. Under such circumstances, even if a teacher was aware of all the parameters of an error, it would often be difficult or unhelpful to explain all the complexities of a student's error.

4.3 **Error Gravity**

By definition, error gravity indicates a **criterion for error correction**, indicating the categories and instances of error which need priority attention. Depending on the seriousness of the error, correction can be decided also on the basis of **who** corrects **which** 'error' (a point taken up in 4.5. below).

Two problems here are that the status (as 'error' or 'mistake') of a particular problem is not always clear, and that in any case students may make more genuine 'errors' than it would be helpful to correct at any one time. There appears to be some consensus amongst linguists (George 1972, Hanzeli 1975, Burt 1975, and Valdman 1975) that the degree of the seriousness of error, or **error gravity**, should be given closer attention in corrective treatment of errors. Vann, Meyer and Lorenz' (1984) study on error gravity revealed that despite individual opinions on error gravity, most members of staff tended to perceive errors in relative rather than absolute terms, with reactions also varying according to age and academic discipline. We must now ask what agreement can be reached on the criteria for error gravity itself.

4.3.1 *'Errors' which interfere with intelligibility/communicability*

The question of effects of errors upon intelligibility or communicability has been partly addressed by the work of Burt and Kiparsky (1972) in their suggested distinction between global and local errors. According to Burt and Kiparsky, global errors may have a more serious effect on communication with regard to overall meaning, whilst local errors belong to the level of syntax. Hicks (1983) claims that some local errors such as word omissions and lexical errors may also cause breakdowns in communication and suggest that there is a need to extend the distinction between the global and the local beyond the level of the sentence to include errors in cohesion and coherence. Hicks' suggestion is partly subsumed in our category of discourse errors (see 4.2.2.1 and 4.2.2.2) but further work is needed to make finer distinctions in this area.

On the whole intelligibility would indicate 'message received' on the part of the listener or reader. This may be dependent on many factors such as correct phonology or lexis, accurate syntax etc., on the part of the speaker. Any one of these in an incorrect form could pose problems for the listener/reader to a lesser or greater degree. An NS Cantonese speaker would find it easier to understand a NS Cantonese speaker's English than an NS English Speaker would a L2 Cantonese speaker's English. The interference level decreases when the listener is accustomed to listening to Cantonese-English phonology and the interference level could decrease also when a reader is able to understand the root causes of interference in writing by understanding the L1 mother tongue.

Errors that affect intelligibility would need priority attention from any recipient as, otherwise, communication breakdown occurs.

4.3.2 *Errors which stigmatize or "irritate"*

Error has also been linked to irritability (Johannson 1978, Ludwig 1982), defined by Ludwig (1982: 275) as "the result of the form of the message intruding upon the interlocutor's perception of the communication". Other studies (Santos, 1984, Vann *et al.* 1984) would regard irritation as belonging to the hearer/listener despite the communicability of the message. Thus a criterion of irritability on hearing errors may be assumed to be subjective on the part of the individual.

It appears therefore that stigmatization generally depends upon the **attitude** of the listener. In the early seventies, without defining **what** errors stigmatize **whom** for **what audience**, linguists (Richards 1973, Corder 1975) were in consensus that errors which stigmatize should have priority in corrective treatment. More recently, Ludwig (*loc.cit.*) described the irritation continuum as ranging from an "unconcerned, undistracted awareness of a communicative error to a conscious preoccupation with form". Vann et al.'s (1984) study revealed that people who were "irritated" by student errors were in fact a minority group and that such reactions cannot be assumed to hold true for the majority audience. It would appear that stigmatization of errors in terms of the "irritation" they provoke belongs to judgements about language which are entirely subjective and cannot be taken as universal.

It is sometimes assumed that it is those errors which stigmatize the learner in the eyes of Native Speakers (NS) that need priority attention. But it is quite unclear **which** errors might stigmatize learners in the eyes of **which** Native Speaker. This is not only a question of degree of individual tolerance, but also of actual target norms. There is at present no single monolithic model of NS English speech that could be prescribed as 'acceptable' world-wide, though there are varieties of English which traditionally carry better status than others (Trudgill 1974, 1975; Labov 1966, 1972).

In short, we can only assume that what may stigmatize the learner in the eyes of one Native Speaker may not do so in the eyes of another Native Speaker. Since the argument for correcting errors which stigmatize seems to be entirely judgemental, there cannot be any recommendations as to what constitutes a 'stigmatized' error or how it can be treated.

4.3.3 *Common Errors*

These are errors which affect a large group of students and which can easily be detected. Common errors are likely to be given due attention in class (Holley and King 1971, Olsson 1972). Such errors may be due either to the complexity of the English Language system itself or to L1 interference. This is an area in which teachers have most experience in practice.

The nature of these types of common errors may be rather diverse and teachers would have to adopt a pattern of treatment geared towards the most urgent needs of the learner. Mina Shaughnessy's book (1977) recommends a systematic analysis of errors and appropriate corrective treatment in written composition for teachers. David Bunton's (1988) book on common errors in Hong Kong records errors typically made by Hong Kong students.

One common error in the local context can be demonstrated (from my own data) in the following utterance by student (C) in a group task-based activity where students are attempting to solve a bank robbery. The errors committed here reflect confusion of the passive/active voice:

C: He **was** not **catch** by the police. Therefore he he **may** not **concern.**

The following error reflecting confusion between adjective/noun can also be considered as a common error by Hong Kong students :

K: Yes, my card suggest that there er from the condition of Mr. Wong's body that it had been dragged a long **distant**.

Preposition errors appear to be fairly common in Cantonese mother-tongue speakers. The following example coincides with an attempt at peer correction which entailed implicit correction of two errors. The two together prove too much for the student as he was only able to monitor one error out of the two :

C: I want to know what is the reason for Louis Ho to was to (jurus) **to** his half brother?

S: Jealous of his half brother.

C: What is the reason for him to jealous **to** his half brother?

Common errors are easier to correct through a general explanation to the whole class by the teacher. It is possible but not likely that self-monitoring can take place in the case of common errors for the very reason that these are areas of mistaken knowledge or linguistic confusion on the part of a large number of students. There will be opportunities for peers to correct common errors if they are more proficient in English than the rest of the class.

4.3.4 *High frequency errors*

High frequency error is considered by Dresdner (1973), Bhatia (1974), Allwright (1975) to deserve special priority attention in error correction. 'High frequency' here indicates repeated occurrence of the same error on the part of an individual student: repeated **tokens** are attested of the same error **type**.

Although the **type/token** distinction was applied some time ago in error analysis research (e.g. Duskova 1969, Dulay and Burt 1974), little development has taken place with regard to its potential importance for error correction research. It is too easily assumed that high error frequency also indicates high error gravity. Yet it can be argued that, rather than the frequency of error tokens, it is the nature of each error type - and its place in the learner's developing competence - that should affect our judgements of error gravity and thus of priority for correction.

When it comes to the judgements we convey to our students, through marks or grades, it is important that we avoid the danger of paying excessive attention to repeated error tokens rather than types.

An exchange by students C and S (see under 4.3.3 above) was followed later by a repeated question from student (C):

C: I want to know why why Louis Louis Ho is jealous **to** his half brother? I don't know.

This constitutes another token of the error type "jealous to". Student (W) in another group committed the same error **"That's means"** 11 times in the same discussion on "Bank Robbery" (group problem-solving activity); the same student repeated the error 6 times in another discussion on "Murder Mystery" (group problem-solving activity), twice in "Youth Magazine" (group decision-making exercise) and 6 times in "Seatbelt Promotion" (another group decision-making exercise). This error appeared in recorded oral practice, but had it appeared in written composition, one wonders what final mark the student would have obtained if the teacher had counted all these repeated errors against him.

Both in empirical research and in classroom practice, it is important to be clear whether repeated errors are counted as one error each time or whether an error type is counted as one error only and the remaining tokens of that type discounted. In error assessment and correction, the overall effect of counting repeated errors has significant results for the student who repeats these errors. For most purposes, it seems more important and appropriate to count error types rather than error tokens. However, token counts may be of use where certain errors appear to have a very high frequency of occurrence, since the more an error appears the more the reader/listener may be 'irritated'. (See, however, 4.3.2).

4.4 Correctibility

In principle, all errors are correctible. The question of correctibility here refers to errors being corrected **when** and by **whom?** To the extent that this is under teacher control, decisions are needed about linguistic classification of error, about error gravity, and also about the ease or difficulty of correction for the learner.

The fundamental distinction between 'error' and 'mistake' already indicates a clear-cut correction policy in terms of classroom practice : that 'errors' (reflecting on competence) should normally be corrected (if at all) by teachers, possibly by peers and least likely by self, whereas 'mistakes' (arising only from performance) can normally be addressed by the student and his peers.

At the linguistic level of analysis, it would be deceptively easy to believe that all errors pertaining to the grammatical system will be genuine 'errors' and not 'mistakes', and, as a result, that corrective treatment will be more appropriately given by teachers. This may be far from the truth: morpho-syntactic errors in fact have a strong possibility of being 'mistakes' by reason of the student not paying attention to form during speech or writing. On the other hand, errors belonging to discourse, phonology and lexis will often constitute genuine 'errors' and not 'mistakes'. Discourse features are not taught as a rule in practice, and errors in the sound system relate both to cultural identity and to limited exposure to NS input. 'Errors' pertaining to lexis however could reflect ignorance of usage rather than meaning. For correction purposes, the teacher needs to have first hand knowledge of learner IL to help decide whether to overlook particular errors, to correct errors, or to allow learners to focus on form and function for themselves.

The categories delineated under the error gravity level also relate to the issue of correctibility in that both the 'intelligibility' and 'common error' categories typically require corrective treatment at the level of the teacher rather than the peer or the self. Whilst intelligibility category relates to global features of language use, the 'common error' category relates to a widespread misunderstanding of a specific part of the language system. In addition, a teacher will undoubtedly choose to correct errors that she feels are likely to stigmatise the learner (despite problems noted in arriving at such judgements), with the frequency of repeated error tokens as one possible factor in these choices.

The issue of correctibility thus draws together all categorisations of error and relates these to the treatment to be given in a classroom context. Some errors should be given priority treatment and others may be left until a later stage. Where corrective treatment is preferred, the relevant choices are between three possible sources of correction : the self in the monitoring function, the learner's peer(s), and the teacher.

5. Conclusion

The criteria for error correction therefore stem from a very basic conceptual distinction, between 'error' and 'mistake', which should permeate all other categories described above, paving the way for appropriate corrective treatment to follow. The three suggested types of treatment (by self, by peers and by the teacher) also align themselves to the error gravity issue in that the less serious the error, the less attention the teacher needs to pay to correcting the error rather than allowing the students to self-correct or peer-correct. Clearly, the status of a particular error type as genuine error or mistake, for a given student's level of linguistic competence, is also one major consideration when determining error gravity. Conversely, the more serious the error, the more likely it becomes that the teacher needs to correct the error in person. This would be an overall approach which could be adopted for future classroom practice which relates directly to the theoretical distinction discussed in this paper.

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ERRORS IN FOCUS?

Native and non-native perceptions of error salience in Hong Kong student English - a case study

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to compare the perceptions of two expert judges from crucially different backgrounds in respect of the relative salience of a range of local errors (if this is indeed their status) typical of the English written by secondary and tertiary students in Hong Kong. The perceptions involved seem to differ substantially.

Differences of this kind obviously have very serious implications for the focus of remedial English courses and of books designed to help local students in the task of 'improving' their English (i.e., rendering it closer to the exonormative - chiefly British - standard). Local usage is as different as it is from this standard for a number of reasons, but one important reason lies in the fact that in Hong Kong most secondary school teachers and many tertiary teachers are themselves ethnic Chinese, and are in very many cases seriously mis-informed as to the status of grammatical and lexical features (see Newbrook (1988)). Their teaching (and the example provided by their own usage) is thus often misleading to students. By the time they reach tertiary level, many students feel able to 'correct' a range of what they perceive as local errors with a considerable amount of confidence; but most of them, in fact, typically fail to spot many genuinely non-standard features of the texts in question, and attempt to 'correct' other features which are already standard (Newbrook, *op. cit.; cf* Gupta (1986:81) on similar phenomena in Singapore).

Since the goal adopted remains the exonormative standard, much remedial work is often needed if students' usage is to approximate the norm; hence the concern in some circles over this matter, and the wide sales of various books, some produced locally (*e.g.*, Chiu (1983)) and some in the People's Republic of China, which aim to enlighten readers on this front. Some of these books are written in English and some (P.R.C. works especially) in Chinese. Many of these books, notably some of the latter group, are themselves seriously misleading, and the need for authoritative information as to just what is and is not standard usage remains largely unsatisfied. Classroom contact with native speakers, which often begins only at tertiary level, brings many students to a realisation (in many cases accompanied by a shock) of just how 'deviant' their English in fact is; and the urgency of the drive towards the avoidance of error is thus intensified (especially for those majoring in English, etc). The demand for books of this kind is therefore still high (perhaps higher) at this level.

Errors of Hong Kong learners: two recent books

Tse (1988) is one of the most recent works to have been produced by a fluent non-native user of English for Hong Kong readership. The body of the book is written in Chinese, and hence the work is rather more accessible to students than it would be if it were in English. It has only 135 pages, and deals with 90 grammatical errors, divided into 9 categories ('Gerunds', etc) with 10 errors in each. There is, of course, no guarantee that the range of really important errors found can be divided into ten categories of this kind such that there is an equal number in each category; indeed, the rigidity of this 9 x 10 format may have forced Tse to include some errors which he perceived as less important and/or to exclude others which were more important than these.

However, we can be confident that Tse perceived these 90 errors as at least amongst the most important ones made by Hong Kong students - perhaps all 90 would be amongst the leading 150 or so.

Tse is Hong Kong born, and studied at postgraduate level at the University of Leeds in England. He is a fluent Cantonese-English bilingual, and is obviously fully literate in both written codes. In my judgment his spoken English in particular is of a very high standard indeed, and his sensitivity to the errors made by local students seems to be exceptional for a non-native speaker. When the book was published Tse was Lecturer in Translation at the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, teaching, among other subjects, the structure of English.

Tse announces in his introduction (no page number) that his book is intended mainly to help students who are studying for the Hong Kong Certificate examination in English, but could also be used by other students. He selected the 90 error-types on the basis of his wide experience of Hong Kong secondary school English.

Another work on the same theme which was about to reach the market when Tse (1988) appeared is Newbrook (fc). This is a much larger work, consisting of two students' volumes of around 150 pages each, plus separate keys. The total number of error-types covered is also much greater, even discounting those which do not involve grammar but rather lexis, etc. There is no constraint on error selection such as Tse's 9 x 10 format. The book is aimed at roughly the same kind of audience, though the fact that it is written in English and includes (particularly in the second volume) some more subtle and complex errors makes parts of it at least more accessible to older students.

I am a native speaker of British English, with an academic background in dialectology and the structure of English. I worked in Hong Kong (City Polytechnic and Chinese University) from 1986 to 1989, after a period in Singapore, and am obviously very familiar with the range of errors made by students, as a result of going through the task of compiling my own book. Although I am not a Sinologist, I am sufficiently familiar with the structure of Chinese to recognise and understand most relevant L1 interference effects (syntactic). Tse at one time served as tutor on my courses, and may have been influenced by me in respect of his perceptions of errors; but his book was compiled before any such influence could have taken effect.

The Study

When I looked through Tse (1988), my immediate impression was that, while all the errors listed were salient enough, and indeed were covered in Newbrook (fc), I would have made a rather different selection had I been restricted to 90 or 100 errors only. I therefore decided to compile a list of what were in my view the most salient of all of my larger group of errors, numbering approximately the same as Tse's. I then compared the two lists, noting that, as mentioned above, Tse was constrained to some extent by his format in respect of his selection. In order to avoid undue interference in my judgment (in either direction) from my study of Tse's book, I did not carry out this study until two months after looking at the work, and did not open it in the interim. By the time I compiled my list I had virtually no memory of the detailed contents of Tse's book.

Constraints on the study

In addition to the constraints of Tse's format, there are other factors which might distort the comparison between Tse's book and my list. As noted, Tse's audience, by and large, is probably intended to be younger, less sophisticated and less competent in English. However, the errors listed by Tse certainly persist in the usage of tertiary students, and the book would thus be

of almost as much help to them as to younger users. If this is how the potential users themselves perceive their needs (and this is not necessarily the case), and if Tse had these perceptions in mind in writing, this difference is perhaps not very important.

Another type of difference might involve divergent perceptions on the part of Tse and myself as to what would qualify as an error for inclusion. My own view is that such a short list must contain only those variables which are:

a) common to the writing and speech of many (preferably most) local students; and

b) especially damaging to interaction with non-Hong Kong people, through either:

   i) being stigmatised in the English-using community at large, or:

   ii) being likely to cause misunderstanding or failure of understanding on the part of non-Hong Kong readers/interlocutors (or, in reading and listening, of the student herself)

I take it that the international character of English is at the centre of Hong Kong's need for the language - it is very seldom spoken in all-local groups in Hong Kong, although it is true that it is used in local business documents, etc - and that, despite the largely 'instrumental' and non-integrative motives for learning English, this factor makes conformity with international norms (rather than with uncodified local pseudo-norms) the desirable target of teaching.

It is possible that Tse, in compiling his book, did not perceive the relative significance of the various errors in the same terms. For instance, his weighting of the relative importance of stigmatisation and misunderstanding/failure of understanding might be different from mine (I perceive these two factors as approximately equal in weight). However, such matters are hard to quantify, and in any case I have no reason to suppose (on the strength of earlier and more recent discussions with Tse) that there is any serious divergence of this nature in respect of our views of the issue.

As noted, the actual means of selection, methodologically speaking, were apparently the same in the two cases; reliance on prolonged personal experience. It is, however, possible that some of the disparities relate to the fact that my experience has been very largely of tertiary (though for the most part sub-degree) rather than secondary students' work; but I do not think that the actual differences between our lists could readily be explained in these terms.

Another difference might lie in Tse's occasionally not realising that some feature of local usage is in fact local only, and hence to be regarded, given the above, as an error. Tse is so proficient in English and so knowledgeable about it that this could only rarely occur, though it might conceivably have been responsible for some omissions. In any case, if this should be the case, it would be better to regard it as part of the focus of this study rather than as a distorting factor. If Tse himself were not aware that a piece of usage was only local, this could be seen as an extreme instance of the more likely kind of case in which he knew about it but did not feel that it was sufficiently important to include (contrary to my own judgment).

It should be noted at the outset that in no case does Tse recommend usage which itself appears to be, in fact, non-standard. In a few cases he does identify as 'incorrect' usage which appears to be standard (though in some cases relatively informal). Examples of this latter include IV.3 and, apparently, II.3. These two problems loom very much larger in the work of some other local writers on errors in English.

Selection of error-types from Newbrook (fc)

I eventually selected 96 error-types as being more or less indispensable to any book, however short, for use in Hong Kong. As will become clear, these error-types were not always directly comparable with those listed by Tse, but it would have been impossible to eliminate the possibility of this kind of disparity and at the same time still avoid experiencing influence arising from awareness of Tse's selection. Despite the disparity, some comparison can be made. My 96 error-types broke down as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Numbers of common errors by category: derived from Newbrook (fc)

Parts of speech confused	1	Modals	9
Nouns - basics	2	Verb voice	2
Determiners, etc	7	Concord	1
Pronouns and relatives	7	Prepositions	21
Comparatives, etc	5	Connectives/short adverbials	13
Verb-forms	3	Sentence structure	15
Tenses	6	Time expressions	4

Some of these entries (e.g., that for 'Concord') cover quite a range of more specific manifestations of error; but no entry covers a whole topic area. For instance, 'Concord' here covers a number of more specfic variants on the one basic error, but does not include every type of error involving concord.

Comparison with Tse (1988): *1. Differences in categorisation*

This breakdown should now be compared with Tse's. However, we must first note that Tse's categories and individual entries are not always of the same types as mine. In the case of the individual entries, as noted above, this effect interferes to some extent with our attempts at comparing the two selections. Tse's system differs from mine most obviously in the following respects:

i) The categories are in some cases rather broad, or relate to rather superficial features of the construction (e.g., a varied group of errors is classified together under 'Adjectives' simply because an adjective normally appears somewhere in each of the relevant constructions); in certain cases the nomenclature is even slightly misleading. I have therefore reorganised Tse's list on lines similar to my own.

ii) More seriously: Tse's individual entries, on the other hand, are often more specific than mine, and in some cases perhaps too specific. Many of them relate, as it seems, to individual lexical items (not themselves part of the grammatical apparatus) rather than to structurally-defined sets of items; in a number of cases the same error is included separately for different items which can co-occur with it in more or less exactly parallel ways. For instance, Tse's entries I.7, II.1 and II.4 are all basically variants on the same error, the redundant use of adverbial *-ly*. Elsewhere, perhaps with more justification, Tse

makes very fine distinctions within what I have regarded as essentially unitary phenomena (e.g., in entries III.1, III.3, III.4, III.6, etc under 'Concord'). The three entries listed above under 'redundant use of *-ly*', together with entries I.6, II.8 etc, are also all examples of part-of-speech confusion, which I again treated (perhaps wrongly) as a basically unitary phenomenon. It is thus hard to compare the lists directly, and different totals have to be given for the two works where a feature is shared (Tse will have, say, 3 or 4 entries 'shared', whereas in terms of my broader individual entries this will amount to only one).

Tse's list of 90 errors can be broken down as in Table 2:

Table 2: Numbers of common errors by category, derived from Tse (1988)

Parts of speech confused	7	Modals	1
Nouns - basics	10	Verb voice	1
Determiners, etc	11	Concord	10
Pronouns and relatives	4	Connectives	1
Comparatives, etc	11	Sentence structure	1
Verb-forms	5	Time expressions	2

Note that 'sentence structure' here includes several word-order phenomena.

2. Major disparities

If we compare the two breakdowns, we note the following major disparities:

a) Tenses, modals, prepositions and connectives are much more prominent in my list. In all four cases, particularly the first three, Tse's relative lack of focus seems strange, given the high level of divergence in local usage which obtains in these areas and the notoriety of many of the individual errors.

b) Comparatives, determiners, concord and assorted types of sentence structure problems are apparently more prominent in Tse's book. However, a simple count disguises the fact that in some cases several of Tse's entries, as noted, correspond with only one of my entries. This applies in the case of concord, and also in that of sentence structure in so far as this involves complement structures after verbs. (As stated above, in neither case was my own entry all-encompassing or intended to cover an entire major topic area, though in the case of complement structures after verbs it was certainly much broader than Tse's equivalent entries).

c) As far as comparatives are concerned, it is interesting that Tse's longer list still omits some other errors of this kind which narrowly failed to appear on my own list. Although we both perceive this area as important, our ideas about which particular phenomena deserve the most attention are clearly rather different (see also below). The same is true to some extent in respect of determiners, where Tse's focus is upon matters of more restricted scope such as descriptive proper names (*(the) United States*, etc) and the small group of words, including *prison*, etc, which have a special use without *the*. My focus is rather

upon more general errors in this area (see d) below). However, there is also, once again, an associated tendency for several of Tse's entries to relate to one of mine.

d) In general, Tse is concerned, as noted, with the details of the usage of individual items, whereas I am more concerned with entire constructions in which a range of items may appear. We have seen that this hinders comparisons between the two lists, but it is also of considerable interest in itself, since it is, I think, not unusual; other books written by Hong Kong Chinese on this theme, such as Chiu *op. cit.*, also devote much more space than mine to topics such as the exact choice of preposition, particle etc to be used with each of a list of particular verbs (and often organise this body of facts in a rather unsystematic way). Specific errors of this type are, in fact, among the hardest of all errors to avoid, since the absence (for the most part) of reliable general rules means that the learner has to absorb and retain separately each specific rule, and cannot generalise with any guarantee of success. In addition, it is not clear that there is such a great deal of urgency about mastering the standard usage in these cases, since - with a few exceptions such as the choice of preposition after bias, etc - the local usage is still intelligible (though it is often perceived as very odd), and since errors in this arbitrary and unsystematic part of the grammar will be more readily forgiven (at least by more sophisticated readers and listeners). It must be observed that this disparity is manifested here despite the fact that my own list itself exhibits to some extent - in those areas where generalisation seems impossible but where the errors are still very salient - the particularising tendency which I have here characterised as predominantly local, notably by including so many individual entries for prepositions.

3. Entries in common

We turn now to an examination of the particular entries shared by the two lists. Of my 96 entries only 14 are shared with Tse, with 3 more 'borderline cases'. These correspond with 36 (+ 3) of Tse's entries. It will be noted that even using Tse's entries the percentage is well under 50 - taking the doubtful cases as halves, the figure is in fact 43%. In terms of my entries the same calculation yields 16%. In either case, but - obviously - especially in the latter, the degree of overlap seems alarmingly low.

It may be felt that my broader categories have forced the second percentage figure down to an unnaturally low level - in other words, that I have (inadvertently) 'cheated'. I would dispute this, since in at least some of these cases Tse seems to have artificially created additional error-types by including variants of a construction which differ only in respect of the particular lexical item involved rather than in terms of any structural parameters.

However, in order to redress the balance, I have looked again at all the cases where two or more entries from Tse (1988) collectively correspond to one of my 14 (+ 3) entries. This applies to 6 of my 14 (but to none of the border-line 3) - 28 of Tse's 36 entries correspond to these 6 (the remaining 8 of these 36 correspond to my remaining 8 on a one-to-one basis). Of these 28, I would include at most only 10 (I.3, I.10, III.1, III.6, VI.2, VIII.3, IX.2, IX.3, IX.7 and IX.9) in a list of 90 or 100 selected at Tse's level of lexically-based specificity. I assume further that approximately half of my previous selections would have to be omitted from a list compiled on such a revised basis. I allow for this by adding half of the remaining 8 cases, where Tse and I do exhibit one-to-one correspondence, plus a quarter mark for each of the borderline 3. This yields a total of 14.75, which is virtually the same as the figure of 15.50 originally arrived at (slightly lower, even). Even if I assume that all 8 + 3 of these previous selections would remain (unlikely), the total is only 19.50, yielding a percentage overlap of 19.5 - 21.7 or so across my selection.

I conclude that there is indeed remarkably little agreement between Tse and myself in respect of what should be emphasised in short treatments of this nature.

It may be worth listing here the 14 + 3 shared errors, according to my original listing: please refer to Figure 1.

Figure 1: Errors identified as common by both Tse (1988) and Newbrook (this paper)

Fig. 1a: Main 14 cases

Tse number(s)	Description	Example
I.3, IX.1-3, IX.5-10	Complement structure	Capable *to do*, spend a day *to revise*, prevent *someone to enter*, succeed *to enter*
I.5	Active/passive, etc	*Determine* for *are determined*
I.6, I.7, II.1, II.4, II.8	Part of speech confusion	She looked healthily
I.10, V.3	Raising to subject	*We are necessary* to ...
II.2	Positive *too*	I did not go *too*
II.10	*Before* for ago	It happened two days *before* (= 'before NOW')
III.1, III.3-4, III.6	Concord	X as well as Y *were* hurt Reading stories *are* fun
IV.9	Double comparative	*More easier*
V.9	*All/both + not*	*All are not interested* (= 'none are interested')
V.10	Question word order	I don't know what *is he* talking about
VI.2, VI.6, VI.8	Uncountable nouns	*Homeworks*
VII.1	No article with nominal adjectives	*British* are friendly
VII.3	No article with generic singulars	*Cow* is useful
VIII.3-4, VIII.6 VIII.8	Confusion of *-ing* and *-ed*	I feel *boring*

(Fig. 1 continued)

Fig. 1b: Marginal 3 cases

Tse number(s)	Description	Example
II.5	*Very/too* X *that*	The sea was *very/too* rough *that* the ferry was cancelled
(Tse gives *very*, my list has *too*; both occur, of course)		
VIII.1	*Comparing/compared*	*Comparing to Singapore*
(Tse recommends *compared to* in sentence-initial position; I discuss such cases as part of a recommendation to avoid the entire construction after a comparative)		
VIII.9	Subject relative deletion	Anyone *is caught* will be charged
(Tse gives one example which suggests that his main focus is not in fact upon the relative clause environment; in my view, this is at the very least much the most crucial locus of this error)		

Discussion

It does not, of course, follow from their inclusion by two writers from such disparate backgrounds that these 14/36 + 3 cases are to be regarded as the most serious (or even as amongst the most serious) errors to be found in Hong Kong student usage. Nevertheless, the fact that they appear in both lists despite the overall lack of agreement between the lists must surely mean something, and all of these cases (except perhaps for the marginal case of II.5 - and quite possibly even that) do indeed appear to qualify extremely well in terms of the criteria for inclusion in treatments of this length which I set out above. Tse's selection of cases such as V.10 is of particular interest, since only a vanishingly small percentage of Hong Kong students - or even of their teachers and lecturers - realise that their usage is unusual at this point. It would appear that such features are indeed perceived as highly salient by those few unusually well-informed Hong Kong commentators who are in fact aware of them.

Having said this, one must admit that there are many other errors which at least some writers might find equally worthy of inclusion but which have been selected in only one (or in neither) of these two lists. Errors which strike me as absolutely essential to list, but which Tse omits, include (in addition to common 'careless' errors such asomission of the *-s* and *-ed* endings):

1) the use of 'Chinese *those*'

2) the use of *it* without any (identifiable) antecedent

3) overextended use of modal *would*

4) overextended use of past perfect *had*

5) confusion of *used to* and *be used to*

6) use of pseudo-present *use to*

7) omission of *if* after *even*

8) confusion of *on the other hand* and *on the contrary*

9) the local use of *later* which is analogous to the use of *before* included by Tse under II.10.

Other commentators may, of course, have still other perceptions. Perhaps works of this kind should be written by committees rather than by individual scholars (local or expatriate).

It may be said that it is not surprising that there is so little agreement between the lists selected by these two writers, given their disparate backgrounds. On the other hand, Tse's obviously fruitful sojourn in the U.K. - added to his unusually successful experiences earlier as a learner of English - and my three years spent in a deluge of Hong Kong speech and writing might have been expected to level off the disparities to a greater extent than appears to have in fact happened. It is certainly striking that two scholars who have been exposed - in theory at least - to the same norm should have reached positions so far removed from each other.

Unfortunately, the upshots of this disparity are potentially very serious, and from an educator's point of view these are obviously much more important than whatever explanations may be offered for such divergence. It seems unlikely that many other locally born writers will develop intuitions much closer to those of native-speaker experts than has Tse; which is to say that - always assuming that neither Tse nor I am in any crucial way atypical of our respective (very select) groups in respect of our intuitions and priorities in this area - most work produced locally will be even further 'off-target' vis-a-vis native-speaker intuitions.

Conclusions

The scale and character of this disparity in respect of intuitions forces educators to consider very clearly what their goals and purposes are in teaching English, and, more specifically, in choosing which 'errors' to correct.

If, as I have suggested, the goal for Hong Kong is the exonormative standard, with a view to contacts with native speakers and with non-native speakers from elsewhere, also adherents of this standard; and if it is thought that this is in some sense a relevant and feasible goal, given the Hong Kong situation; it follows that the intuitions of local experts should be made the basis of recommendations only in so far as these agree with those of experts who are members of the norm-providing community - these latter are, of course, mostly native speakers. But it seems likely, on the present evidence, that very few, if any, local experts, even those whose own English is largely error-free, will have the 'right' intuitions about precisely which errors will be perceived as salient by interlocutors or readers from elsewhere (from the U.K., the U.S.A., etc in particular), and hence are suitable for foregrounding in remedial training and in books such as Tse (1988). Even when these scholars' own usage is more or less standard, it appears that the most that can be anticipated from them is avoidance of actual mistakes in identifying usage as standard or non-standard, with even this not always being possible. Their advice as to which errors should be made the focus of attention is, it seems, likely to be misleading, and much classroom work aimed at the eradication of salient errors may thus prove of rather little value, - while errors of a more serious nature may be left for the most part uncorrected.

The average classroom teacher will, of course, be even more badly placed in this respect, and may lose whatever limited confidence she may have in her ability to 'correct' her students' English. This problem could be solved only by the ready availability of suitably qualified native speakers - and a willingness to make use of their expertise, and, except in unusual cases where there was actual counter-evidence, to rely on their intuitions rather than on anyone else's.

On the other hand, if a local endonormative standard were to be developed, the need for such measures would disappear, and the main subject for concern would be the uniformity of local experts' views and their conformity with such a standard. Hong Kong students would, in other words, be attempting the much easier task of writing or speaking for an imagined local audience (albeit one with a very high educational level and high proficiency in English). However, it seems very unlikely that any such local standard will ever be set up in Hong Kong, other than on a purely *de facto* basis because of widespread ignorance of the details of the exonormative standard (see Newbrook (1988, 1989)). Reliance on local intuitions, whether they themselves are uniform or not, is likely to remain a 'second-best' only.

I want to emphasise that I am in no way criticising Tse's excellent work or, more generally, the scholarship of Hong Kong writers on English. I am merely drawing attention to a somewhat alarming fact, which - in respect of the magnitude of the Tse-Newbrook divergence - did indeed come as something of a surprise to me. More rigorous surveys are, of course, needed; and what is eventually done about this matter is, I take it, for Hong Kong people to decide - but it seems clear enough that if the Hong Kong classroom teacher and the concerned student continue to depend upon local commentators for guidance on avoiding errors they may find - as and when they come into contact with the international English-speaking community - that their work on this front has proved surprisingly and disappointingly low in 'cost-effectiveness'. How seriously this may be regarded is a matter yet to be determined.

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